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ABSTRACT

This research study attempts to determine how teenage workers develop their employability skills in their first formal jobs. Case studies were carried out in 12 Australian enterprises of varying sizes and drawn from different industry areas. In each case study the following staff were interviewed: senior managers and/or human resources management staff, site managers, supervisors working with novice workers, novice workers, and co-workers of novice workers. The research sought to identify the following: (1) why some organizations recruit novice workers and how they view them; (2) what processes are in place to train novice workers in employability skills; (3) how novice workers learn about employability skills through employment; and (4) some good models of employability skill training and how these can be used by employers who do not work well with novice employees. Findings include that organizations recruit novice workers because of low cost, youthful enthusiasm, and organizational obligations to communities and industry; they use processes such as buddy systems, mentoring, staff meetings, and rotation of tasks to develop employability skills; and they use comprehensive training systems, regular team meetings, performance management approach, third-party approach, buddying or mentoring systems, and supportive environment models of employability skill training. (Includes 74 references, 11 tables, and 2 appendixes.) (MO)

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Reference Group A

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Taryn Collins
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Joe Munro
Ben Piper

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Executive summary

This research study aimed to find out how teenage workers developed their employability skills in their first formal jobs. With young people commencing formal part-time work as early as 13 or 14 years of age (and even younger in some cases), it follows that employability skills are not necessarily developed at school, even if it were accepted that the school curriculum should include such matters as a priority.

Thus the project set out to document the processes by which first-time workers develop these skills while at work. During mid-2002, case studies were carried out in 12 Australian enterprises (including three group training companies) of varying size, and drawn from different industry areas. The enterprises were located in four states: New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and Queensland, and included examples of novice workers who were part-time student workers as well as school leavers in their first jobs. Industry areas chosen were indicative of those employing the majority of novice workers, and included fast food, retail, electrical, electronics, hairdressing, hospitality, administration, local government, manufacturing and newspaper delivery. In each case study, the following staff were interviewed: senior managers and/or human resource management staff, site managers, supervisors working with novice workers, novice workers themselves, and co-workers working alongside them.

The research questions were as follows:

- Why is it that some organisations recruit large numbers of novice workers and how do such employers view young workers?
- What processes are in place at corporate, managerial and supervisory levels to train these novice workers in employability skills?
- How do novice workers themselves view, and engage in, learning about employability skills though employment?
- What are some good models of employability skills training and how can the processes of employability skills training be communicated to, and utilised by, other employers who currently have less tolerance for young people and less expertise in developing employability skills?

The list of employability skills and attributes identified in 2002 by the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2002) was used as the basis for the research.

This report includes individual reports on each of the 12 case studies. A number of the case studies, including the three group training companies, included more than one site.

Why do employers recruit novice workers?

Although the reasons varied among enterprises, the following were the main findings of the study relating to the reasons why companies liked to hire novice workers:

- *Low cost:* Industrial awards and enterprise agreements allow for lower wages for workers up to the age of 18.

- *Enthusiasm:* Novice workers possess youthful exuberance which lifts morale in the workplace as well as presenting a good image to customers.
- *Mouldability:* Novice workers do not bring bad habits with them and can be trained in company procedures and socialised into company mores.
- *Technological skills and up-to-date knowledge:* Novice workers have good computer skills, and (for apprentices and trainees) bring up-to-date techniques and knowledge from their off-the-job training.
- *Fresh views and ideas:* Novice workers offer different ways of looking at workplace issues.
- *Community obligations:* Employers wish to 'do the right thing' by giving young people a chance.
- *Industry obligations:* Employers wish to maintain industry skill levels by bringing on new workers.
- *Enterprise skill mix:* Novice workers fill low-skill jobs.
- *Operating hours:* Novice workers (especially student workers) are available for non-standard working hours.
- *Tradition:* Some employers have a long tradition of employing apprentices.
- *Physical fitness:* Novice workers have stamina and are able to do hard physical work.
- *Organisational image:* Novice workers present a youthful image which is an important marketing tool.
- *Staff development:* Supervision and training of novice workers provides valuable experience for existing staff.

The employers' views of novice workers were more positive than those found in other research. There was also more of a sense of obligation to the community and the industry in their hiring decisions than has been reported in the literature (except for the apprenticeship literature). Many of the managers and staff interviewed expressed great satisfaction in the fact that they took on raw teenagers and turned them into effective workers.

Some employers preferred to recruit young people with fairly well-developed employability skills, while others, particularly those recruiting younger teenagers, accepted that their new staff would have very low levels of skills.

Employers found a number of positive attributes among their novice workers but also some negative attributes. Some found that novice workers had difficulty adjusting to full-time work after being accustomed to a school environment. The length of the working day and the lack of structure at work could create problems. Younger part-time student workers sometimes had difficulty in viewing work as a serious activity as opposed to a setting for social interactions. For some young people, personal matters such as transport problems, relationship difficulties and occasionally drug or alcohol difficulties, impinged upon work to a greater extent than employers would have liked. Novice workers were often shy and were unwilling to ask questions, they did not understand the impression they were making on other workers, and they sometimes lacked basic skills like the need to keep the working environment clean.

Teamwork and communication were the most commonly valued employability skills, while reliability, a sense of humour and enthusiasm, were the most commonly valued attributes.

What processes do organisations use to develop employability skills?

This question was answered at two levels: firstly, within the systems in place through which employability skills were developed, and secondly, through an analysis of the techniques used by individual managers and workers in their interactions with the novice workers.

The formal processes were as follows:

- recruitment and induction
- buddy systems
- mentoring
- organisational socialisation
- valuing of training of all types
- placing novice workers with supervisors who had been trained in managing novice workers
- staff meetings
- staff assessments and performance appraisal systems
- mistake management
- conflict resolution
- disciplinary approaches
- rotation of tasks
- respect for the contribution young people could make
- allocating increased responsibility
- badging.

Individual interactions were also important in encouraging the development of employability skills. All those working with novice workers needed to be aware of the way in which they dealt with these young people. Simple strategies such as including them in conversation, including them in social activities, and showing interest in them as individuals all assisted. Managers could assist by setting clear limits, praising, giving negative feedback in a non-threatening manner, and working alongside novice workers until they felt confident. Managers mentioned that they needed to set a good example and needed to show the novice workers different ways of working to enable them to develop confidence and learn how to learn from different staff.

Most of these approaches were not used solely to develop employability skills. The processes were primarily used to develop workers' technical skills (that is, to enable appropriate performance of job tasks) and had a secondary role in the development of employability skills. With workers who had not worked before, however, more emphasis was placed on some of these approaches because such workers needed more assistance in learning how to operate in a workplace setting.

How do novice workers learn employability skills?

Novice workers themselves used a range of approaches to develop their employability skills. They asked questions, practised active listening, sought out more helpful staff as mentors, developed working relationships with managers and mixed socially with other staff. They also sought to make a good impression, smiling a lot, getting to work early, asking for extra tasks, seeking feedback, and learning when to offer suggestions and when to keep quiet. They developed systems for organising their work and took advantage of off-the-job training opportunities. Novice workers who had failed were generally those who had not prioritised work above home life, and who had been afraid to ask questions for fear of appearing stupid.

Although the project only set out to examine workplace issues, other factors which assisted in the development of employability skills were mentioned by those interviewed. These included school and extra-curricular activities which had been undertaken before starting work (or in the case of student workers, concurrently with work), as well as three major facilitators: group training company staff, parents, and training providers (where formal contracts of training were involved).

Good models of employability skills development

The six most effective models examined in the study were:

- *Comprehensive training systems:* systems for developing technical skills were also generally effective in developing employability skills.
- *Regular team meetings:* these involved new workers in the organisation and could also be used specifically to address employability skills issues relating to all staff not merely new staff.
- *Performance management approach:* the performance management systems for junior staff foregrounded employability skills, and the performance indicators for managers foregrounded their role in developing employability skills in novice workers.
- *Third-party approach:* exemplified by, but not restricted to, group training companies, third parties could provide an additional source of employability skills development as well as intervening in difficult situations.
- *Buddying or mentoring systems:* pairing the new worker either with a co-worker or a more senior member of staff was highly effective, as long as the partner was selected carefully.
- *Supportive environment:* whatever formal systems were in place, one of the most important features of a workplace where employability skills were well-developed was its supportive nature. Tolerance and respect were the two key factors.

The report proposes three further models, which might be useful in adding to the models already being practised:

- *A 'work experience' model:* preparing employers for a novice worker in much the same way as they are prepared for work experience would assist the employer in understanding what a novice worker's needs were and how employability skills could most effectively and most speedily be developed.
- *Individual induction programs:* encouraging employers of novice workers to develop six-month plans for their new staff would enable a range of experiences and opportunities for feedback to be planned.
- *Project learning:* engaging novice workers in authentic but small projects, which are of immediate use to the workplace, could improve novice workers' confidence.

In addition, structured training for supervisors, buddies and co-workers dealing with novice workers would be valuable. Such training needs to include information on what it is like to begin working life, as well as suggested processes for assisting the development of employability skills. It was noted during the research that staff working with novice workers reported a range of methods by which they had learned to undertake the role effectively, but there was little standardisation of learning procedures, except in large companies which routinely recruited large numbers of teenagers.

Why are workplaces important?

Although employability skills may be developed through a range of activities and at a variety of locations, there are reasons why workplaces are appropriate, and even vitally important sites for their development. Employability skills are developed throughout a person's working life and hence employers need to view the process of employability skills development as a whole-of-workforce issue. The range of employability skills possessed by young workers starting their first jobs varies greatly. Some may have well-developed skills and others, sometimes through no fault of their own, poorly developed skills. Employers need to be prepared for the full range, particularly when they are recruiting younger teenagers, and in a tight labour market where they cannot 'pick and choose'. Employability skills are context-bound, in that different industries and employers value and weight

the skills and attributes quite differently. The worth of employability skills can only be fully appreciated in the workplace where the consequences of such skills can be seen.

Finally, there was little indication from the research that employers desired novice workers to be any different from the way they were already. They accepted that, in employing a teenager who had never worked before, they would have to put some effort into making the employee a functioning worker. The report is therefore not advocating any radical departure from existing practice, but merely an extension of such practice to more workplaces. The report also offers a number of suggestions for formalising many of the strategies which already exist.

Introduction

This research study aimed to determine how teenage workers developed their employability skills in their first formal jobs. With young people commencing formal part-time work as early as 13 or 14 years of age (and even younger in some cases), it follows that employability skills to be applied later at work are not necessarily developed at school, even if it were accepted that the school curriculum should include such matters as a major priority. Thus the project set out to document the processes by which first-time workers develop these skills while at work.

During mid-2002 case studies were carried out in 12 Australian enterprises (including three group training companies) of varying size and drawn from different industry areas. The enterprises were located in four states: New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and Queensland.

In the report these new workers in their first formal jobs are described as 'novice workers'. For the purposes of the project, a worker was regarded as a novice worker if he or she had undertaken no previous paid work, or had only previously done occasional or informal work. For example, some of the young workers had previously undertaken occasional days of work at a relative's or friend's workplace. In one of the case studies (Hamburger House), young people who had not worked formally before were called 'first-time workers' by the enterprise. The use of this term was considered for the report, but rejected because the evidence suggested that formal jobs were almost always preceded by informal engagement with the workforce.

It would be expected that novice workers would generally be in their teenage years, although it is possible that a university graduate aged 20 or older might never have had formal work. Some other older people might have special reasons for having been out of the workforce in their teenage years.

Background

The term 'employability skills', like 'generic skills', is difficult to define and can be interpreted in a number of different ways. The third chapter of this report, which describes the research methodology, details some of the international developments and debates relating to the terms. In Australia since the late 1990s, a number of projects have examined employability skills and how they can be better developed.

A number of competing definitions of employability and employability skills exist (Hughes & Stoner 2001). For the purposes of this project, however, it was decided to work with the definition adopted in a recent Australian report produced by the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry:

> Employability skills are defined as skills required not only to gain employment but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions.
>
> (Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2002)

Working with this definition enabled the project's comparability with other current research. The definition is valuable in its recognition that employability skills:

- refer to skills needed both to get a job and to do well in that job
- imply positive outcomes both for an individual person and for his or her employing organisation.

It was understood among the researchers that employability skills were continually developing in every person; they were not acquired at one point in time.

The research gap addressed in this project

Because the project focussed upon workers new to the workforce, it filled a research gap, since other research has addressed either pre-employment development of employability skills, or development of such skills in existing workforces within companies. It set out to challenge the deficit view of school leavers and other young workers, and to examine the positive attributes of novice workers, and the actual processes by which employers work with these new workers. Improved development of employability skills in novice workers is important because it is likely to have the following effects:

- reducing turnover among young people in the early months of work (although some turnover is inevitable as Bilsker and Marcia [1991], point out)
- reducing the likelihood of young people becoming disillusioned with workplaces and thereby becoming at risk of long-term unemployment
- assisting employers to gain maximum commitment and productivity from young workers
- improving young people's ability to adapt and settle in to subsequent jobs
- building a better foundation for lifelong learning through work.

Overview of project

In order to achieve these purposes, a research study in 12 Australian enterprises was carried out. The research questions were as follows:

- Why is it that some organisations recruit large numbers of novice workers and how do such employers view young workers?
- What processes are in place at corporate, managerial and supervisory levels to train these novice workers in employability skills?
- How do novice workers themselves view, and engage in, learning about employability skills though employment?
- What are some good models of employability skills training and how can the processes of employability skills training be communicated to, and utilised by other employers who currently have less tolerance for young people and less expertise in developing employability skills?

Each case study involved interviews with senior managers and/or human resource management staff, site managers, supervisors, young novice workers, and those working alongside young novice workers. A cross-case analysis was then carried out by the research team. Two reference groups, one of experts drawn from key national bodies, with employer and training provider representation, and the other of teenagers working part time, were consulted at key points during the project.

Structure of the report

The next chapter provides an overview of some of the literature most relevant to the project, and is followed by a chapter describing the research method. The main findings of the study, presented thematically, are offered in the subsequent section, while the final chapter analyses the findings and draws together the major implications. The 12 individual case study reports are included in full at appendix A. The case study protocols are given in appendix B.

Review of relevant literature

This review of literature covers two major areas of relevance to the project:

- the conceptualisation and categorisation of generic skills and employability skills, in Australia and overseas
- the experiences of novice workers as they begin their life in the workforce and the strategies utilised by employers to induct workers into workplaces.

Generic skills and employability skills

In countries where competency-based training has been part of the debate surrounding vocational education and training (VET), generic, or employment-related skills, have been a consistent feature of policy approaches that seek to identify sets of skills or attributes deemed necessary for participation in contemporary society. Moy (1999) has found that international catalysts for a focus on generic skills include:

- an increasingly competitive global market
- rapid technological change
- new forms of work and work organisation
- the evolution of knowledge-intensive economies, characterised by an increased focus on the service sector and the customisation of products and services. (Moy 1999, p.5)

This list may be summarised by noting that the employment environment of the twenty-first century, characterised by lean staffing and the need for high performance, requires all workers to perform at maximum effectiveness. Kearns and Smith (2001) provide a similar list to Moy's but with the addition of the imperative for lifelong learning. Hughes and Stoner (2001) add the concept that the development of employability skills also helps to avoid social exclusion of certain groups or individuals.

A wealth of literature spanning a number of years identifies the need and advantages of developing creative, critical and self-monitoring learners (Stevenson 1995). Capelli et al. (1997) suggest that, as a result of the changing work environment and raised skill requirements, all individuals now require the competencies and qualities previously associated with 'more highly educated individuals' (1997, p.165). A complicating factor in this area is the terminology applied, since a wide range of terms are in use internationally.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) DeSeCo Project[1] has found that, while the lack of agreed definition of competence itself can be reconciled within such approaches, considerable difference remains about which competencies should be designated as key (Weinert 2001). Table 1 gives some indication of the international scope of these developments and reflects their widespread application.

1 The OECD project on the Definition and Selection of (key) Competencies (DeSeCo).

Table 1: Different terms used for generic skills or competencies

Country	Framework
Australia	Key competencies
New Zealand	Essential skills
United States	Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) & workplace know-how
United Kingdom	Core/common skills & employability skills
France	Transferable competencies
Germany	Key qualifications
Denmark	Process independent qualifications
Italy	Transversal competencies
Netherlands	Core competencies
Canada	Strategy for prosperity
South Africa	Critical cross field outcomes
Singapore	Critical enabling skills training (CREST)
Finland	Framework for evaluating educational outcomes
Norway	Core curriculum
Switzerland	Trans-disciplinary goals

Source: Comyn (in progress)

Specific employment-related generic skills or competencies have been identified in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, South Africa and the United States (Werner 1994). Other countries, such as Norway, Switzerland and Finland, have placed greater emphasis on the broader social relevance of generic skills (Nijhof & Streumer 1998; Rychen 2000), and still others have linked the issue to debates on qualification frameworks and processes of curriculum development or assessment (for example Denmark and Germany).

Kamarainen and Cheallaigh (2000) have noted that these variations not only reflect the use of parallel concepts, but also the fact that seemingly identical concepts are given different meanings in different national contexts.

For example, the British National Skills Task Force recently refined their nation's approach to the development of generic skills, redefining them to be 'those transferable skills, essential for employability which are relevant at different levels for most' (National Skills Task Force 2000, p.27). Australia's Mayer Committee defined their set of generic skills (key competencies) as being 'essential for effective participation in the emerging patterns of work and work organisation'. The Mayer key competencies are as follows:

- collecting and analysing information
- communicating ideas and information
- planning and organising activities
- working with others in teams
- using mathematical ideas and techniques
- solving problems
- using technology.

(Australian Education Council 1993)

Singapore's Critical Enabling Skills Training Initiative (CREST) seeks to 'transform [the] workforce to continuously adapt to change, learn new skills and meet the challenges of the knowledge age' (Critical Enabling Skills Training Initiative 2002). By comparison, the OECD's DeSeCo project positioned their approach to key competencies by suggesting that they were those 'competencies and skills relevant for an individual to lead a successful and responsible life and for society to face the challenges of the present and future' (Rychen 2000, p.2).

The difficulties associated with defining a set of generic skills partly relates to a range of issues that are not always resolved during development. Unlike the current DeSeCo project, many

conceptualisations of generic skills have proceeded without clear conceptual and theoretical foundations. The development of such foundations involves a number of issues, which the OECD have identified as including:

- whether a normative, philosophical or socially critical frame of reference is adopted or whether they are based simply on the observation of practices
- the level of abstraction and generality with which key competencies are defined
- the hypothetical structure underlying key competencies
- the extent to which psychological features can be modified through learning
- how they can be acquired through planned instructional programs. (Rychen 2000, p.8)

In many cases, the development of lists of generic competencies has involved groups of stakeholders from the fields of industry, government and education. Given the varying ideologies and values of those involved, it is not surprising that debates surrounding the definition and taxonomy of generic skills have been underpinned by questions concerning the purposes of education in a changing world. Markedly, these debates are often dominated by economic discourses and related ideas of employability and the development of human capital to support emerging labour markets. As Trier (2001) notes in relation to the DeSeCo project, 'it comes as no surprise that in practically all country reports, competency demands from the economic sector take a prominent place, with demands documented from employer associations, trade unions, education–business partnerships, labour-market agencies and accountability bodies (2001, p.12).

While generic skills agendas can be linked with different educational challenges, Kearns (2000) has identified two broad approaches to the development of generic skills from the literature, namely what he terms:

- an American model which involves a broad, flexible, and holistic set of generic skills, which include basic skills, personal attributes, values and ethics, learning to learn, as well as workplace competencies of the Mayer type
- an Anglo-Australian model, which involves a relatively narrow and instrumental set of key skills/key competencies which are broadly similar. In both countries personal attributes and values have been excluded from the identified key competencies (Kearns 2000, p.2)

To these two broad approaches might be added the European approach which incorporates broader social issues as well as workplace-related issues. In this sense the debate surrounding key competencies can be linked to the two major approaches to lifelong learning—one related to learning for work and the other which includes social and citizenship engagement (Wain 1987).

Some of the differences in approaches to generic skills are shown in table 2, mapped against the Mayer competencies. The countries referenced in the table were largely chosen because of the ease of dealing with the taxonomies and skills included in their approach to generic skills.

Nijhof (1998) suggests that most generic skills taxonomies have used normative models that were not empirically validated, and Kamarainen and Cheallaigh (2000) have identified a framework of three parallel approaches to generic skills, each with a different scope and focus. These approaches are:

- the atomistic approach (for example, key skills) which have a focus on the skills base of individual learners
- the non-formal holistic approach (for example, key competences or transversal competences) which have a focus on competences based on work-related groups and organisational settings
- the institutionally oriented holistic approach (for example, key qualifications) which have a focus on the renewal of established qualification frameworks and on promoting a capacity for lifelong learning and/or the development of new qualifications (Kamarainen & Cheallaigh 2000, p.4)

Table 2: Examples of national approaches to generic competencies

Key competencies	Singapore critical enabling skills	US (SCANS)	NZ essential skills
✧ Collecting, analysing and organising information	✧ Literacy	✧ Information ✧ Foundation skills: basic skills	✧ Information skills
✧ Communicating ideas and information	✧ Listening and oral communication		✧ Communication skills
✧ Planning and organising activities	✧ Personal effectiveness	✧ Resources ✧ Foundation skills: personal qualities	✧ Self-management skills ✧ Work and study skills
✧ Working with others and in teams	✧ Group effectiveness	✧ Interpersonal skills	✧ Social skills
✧ Using mathematical ideas and techniques			✧ Numeracy skills
✧ Solving problems	✧ Problem-solving and creativity	✧ Foundation skills: thinking skills	✧ Problem-solving and decision-making skills
✧ Using technology		✧ Technology & systems	
	✧ Learning to learn		
	✧ Organisational effectiveness		
	✧ Leadership		

Source: Comyn (in progress) adapted from Australian Education Council (1993, p.11)
Note: SCANS=Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills

Trier (2001), in his recent assessment of the DeSeCo country contribution process, also suggests that reforms have tended to fall into three main categories, albeit with slightly different emphasis. In some countries, generic skills initiatives, in the context of curriculum development, remained mainly a teaching strategy to improve schools, in others they were embedded in broad national efforts of societal renewal, and in yet others, the 'triggering motive was to maintain or improve the national competitiveness in an increasingly global economy' (Trier 2001, p.11). Part of his analysis of 12 OECD countries is shown below in table 3.

Table 3: Inter-country variation of frequency and weighting of mentions of 'key competencies'

Present in all frameworks	Present in all but weighted differently	In some frameworks but not in others
Learning/lifelong learning	Autonomy/self-management	Creativity/expression/aesthetic competencies
	Action orientation/taking decisions	
Mother tongue literacy	Value education/ethics	Foreign languages/internationalisation
Communication competencies		Cultural identity and tradition/ intercultural competencies
Social competencies/co-operation/ teamwork		Religion
Information/problem solving/information technology-media competencies		Political competencies/democracy
Numeracy/mathematical literacy		Ecological awareness/valuing nature
		Physical ability/health

Source: Trier (2001, p.11)

Thus, while there is considerable difference amongst the range of international approaches, to what might broadly be termed generic skills, the work of the OECD in developing generic skills indicators for international benchmarking assessments is a strong indication of their currency at least within Western countries.

Indeed, as key agencies, such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Bank, are now increasingly integrating targets related to skills and education within the projects that they negotiate with client countries, it is worth noting that frameworks that include cross-curricula outcomes are being encouraged. The International Labour Organisation's Model Core Work Skills project and the ongoing OECD DeSeCo project suggest that debates surrounding generic skills/key qualifications/cross curricula outcomes are likely to continue, particularly as the rhetoric surrounding 'knowledge workers', 'high performance workplaces' and 'the new economy' continue to feature in the literature surrounding education and training.

Recent Australian developments in employability skills

Towards the end of the 1990s in Australia, as in some other countries, discussion has shifted from 'generic skills' towards 'employability skills'. Kearns (2000) has pointed out that the Mayer key competencies include neither personal attributes nor specific employability skills, in contrast to American models such as Carnevale (1991). As Kearns (2000) has pointed out, the term 'employability skills' can have a broad view which incorporates other types of generic skills within it, but it may also be viewed more narrowly as the skills which enable people to gain, keep and progress within employment. Kearns (2000) includes such skills in three of his four clusters: work readiness and work habits, interpersonal skills and learning, thinking and adaptability skills.[2]

The change in terminology from generic skills to employability skills clearly denotes a shift in thinking from skills for the whole of life to skills for the workplace. Australian industry has taken a large interest in this debate, with, for example, a survey of employers carried out by the Australian Industry Group in 1999, revealing a view among the respondents that young people entering employment lack employability skills. The prominent role of industry is in line with the international trend noted by Trier (2001).

A recent project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training and carried out by the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, set out to identify 'possible new requirements for generic employability competencies that industry requires or will require, in the foreseeable future, since the Mayer key competencies were developed' (Business Council of Australia & the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2002, p.2).

The list of employability skills identified in this report was as follows:

- communication
- team work
- problem-solving
- initiative and enterprise
- planning and organising
- self-management
- learning
- technology.

In this categorisation, each skill was given a number of sub-elements. In addition, a number of personal attributes were identified which contribute to employability: loyalty, commitment, honesty and integrity, enthusiasm, reliability, personal presentation, common sense, positive self-esteem, a sense of humour, a balanced attitude to work and home life, ability to deal with pressure,

[2] The fourth cluster is 'enterprise, innovation and creativity' skills.

motivation, and adaptability. As noted in the previous chapter, this list is used as the basis for the current study.

The attributes, or personal characteristics, may be less amenable to modification than those skills, which can be directly observed through behaviour. Hughes and Stoner (2001, p.2) note that a British Government report includes what are called 'deployment skills', meaning such characteristics as self-presentation, self-confidence and basic work habits. These appear to be attributes which, although personal characteristics rather than skills, are deployed in employment situations in the form of skills.

Novice workers and workplaces

A common feature of the debates surrounding generic and employability skills is an assumption that these qualities in workers should be developed before they begin their working lives. Stasz (1998) argues that the 'lack of a clear and common conceptual framework for defining and assessing skills has been especially problematic for school reformers' (1998, p.189). In comments such as this there is an implicit acceptance of this assumption. The 'problem' of entrants to the workforce who do not possess the relevant generic or employability skills is owned by schools or vocational institutes, and through constructs such as the list of 'graduate qualities' developed by the Australian Technology Network (of universities), increasingly by universities. These educational institutions are seen as having a responsibility to produce graduates who have qualities which industry is seen to demand.

What is missing from this view of generic and employability skills is the role of employers in developing such skills. Yet a traditional role of workplaces which recruit school leavers has been to mould novice workers into effective participants in the workforce. This role is seen most forcefully, and through centuries of practice, in systems such as apprenticeship (for example, Lane 1996). Research with employers of apprentices (for example, Smith 1996, 2000; Harris et al. 1998) indicates that such employers are fully aware of the shortcomings of novice workers but, partly in spite of such shortcomings, and, even, partly because of them, many such employers commonly find great fulfilment in their role in developing these novice workers. This picture is at odds with other research, which suggests that employers want novice workers to come ready-made with employability skills.

In order to illuminate this apparent discrepancy, it is instructive to examine a broader range of literature and research. There appears to be only a very small body of international literature specifically relating to the development of employability skills at work. Maglen and Hopkins (2000) stress the importance of equity issues and the need to be aware that employability skills in relation to a poor-quality job cannot be compared with those in relation to a high-quality job. Woodruffe (2000) reminds employers that in 'marketing' employability skills development they should be careful not to unwittingly convey a message that they are preparing their employees for careers outside the organisation. Two studies have examined the development of employability skills in young workers: Yat-chuen (2000) in school leavers in information technology, and Davies (1999) in part-time university student workers.

The last example highlights an important point, that most novice workers nowadays commence work part time while still studying, often in 'non-career' jobs. Recent Australian studies such as Smith and Green (2001) and Robinson (1999) have explored this area in some detail.

Unwin and Wellington (2001) carried out a study of the development of 'core skills' in British modern apprentices. They note that a study by Dench et al. (1998 cited in Unwin & Wellington, 2001, p.77) had found that employers, while interested in such skills, tended to be interested in the skills only at a low level. In their research into young workers, Unwin and Wellington (2001) found that, although there was variation in the way in which the modern apprentices viewed core skills, those who were more satisfied with the concept were those who developed them in tandem with technical skills rather than receiving separate training. Communication seemed to be the most

highly regarded core skill. However, the study was based on the practice in British modern apprenticeships of recording of core skills in a portfolio and is therefore not directly comparable to the current study.

In the absence of a significant body of literature relating to the development of employability skills at work, the vast body of literature in the human resources area and the school-to-work area offers a feasible ground for study and one which illuminates the beginning experiences of novice workers and how employers deal with such workers.

American studies from the psychology discipline (Crites 1976; Herr & Cramer 1984) have discussed the problems some young people experience when commencing work and the types of conditions and employer actions which aid or hinder the adjustments. Wellington (1994) in the United Kingdom has pointed out the types of 'attitude' which employers want to see in new workers, highlighting the essentially conservative and discriminatory nature of such preferences. A long-term decline in the number of Australian entry-level jobs for school leavers (for example, Sweet 1988) and the increasing complexity of work may mean that there may now be less tolerance than previously in the workplace for young people learning how to work.

Recent research (for example, Marsh & Williamson 1999) suggests that Australian school leavers are not experiencing as much difficulty in the labour market as was thought during the 1990s, Long (2002), for example, finding that only 4.7% of 19-year-olds in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) cohort were actually unemployed and seeking work. However, finding a job does not necessarily mean keeping it, nor finding satisfaction in work.

A number of detailed studies have charted the experiences of school leavers entering the workforce. These include Ashton and Field (1976), West and Newton (1983) Griffin (1985) and Hodkinson (1995) in the United Kingdom; Borman (1991) in the US; and Reeders (1989) and Smith (2000) in Australia. As mentioned earlier, there has been some recent work relating to part-time student workers in Australia, although the bulk of the literature in this area is American (for example, Greenberger & Steinberg 1986). Borman's findings are interesting in that they challenge what she sees as a dominant view of young workers as 'unskilled, defiant and unready to assume responsibility' (Borman 1991, p.25). Borman found the school leavers in her study resourceful and skilled. However, the literature does clearly indicate that a proportion of young people do have what has been described as an 'attitude problem' (Becker & Hills 1981). Sometimes, frequent job-changing is seen as a characteristic of young people who lack employability skills, although job-changing is seen by other commentators as normal and often positive (Bilsker & Marcia 1991). Attrition in initial employment has been identified as a problem in Australia, particularly when associated with apprenticeships and traineeships, which involve government funding. The reasons for attrition as reported, for example, by Cully and Curtain (2001) may be linked at least in part to inadequately developed employability skills among some young people.

The study by Smith (2000) of young people in their first jobs is unusual among such transition-to-work studies in that it focusses on the learning processes experienced by young people starting full-time work. She proposes a taxonomy of ten 'domains of learning' which is presented in table 4.

Most of these domains are generic rather than specific, and several are related to 'employability' in the sense of fitting in and getting on at work. These domains of learning have recently been used in a project analysing school-based new apprentices' learning (Smith & Wilson 2002). It was clear from the Smith (2000) research that few of young people's challenges at work related to the technical side of their jobs; the majority were 'fitting in'; that is employability, issues.

Table 4: Domains of learning in young people's first year of work

Domain	Description
Technical skills	Those skills typically covered in competency standards
Generic competencies	Those competencies described in the Mayer key competencies and similar classifications
Knowledge	Underlying 'content' or 'discipline' knowledge (propositional and procedural)
Learning about the occupation	Understanding what is involved in 'being' a member of the occupation
Learning about the organisation	A full understanding of the company's operations
Learning about the industry	An appreciation of the industry within which the company is located
Job keeping and political skills	Knowledge of the 'attitude' required by the organisation
Learning about employee/industrial relations	Industrial relations procedures in the industry and in the organisation
Learning about oneself	Becoming self-aware and the relationship between oneself and the world of work
Learning about learning	The types of learning methods available and which are most appropriate for given situations

Source: adapted from Smith (2000, p 376)

Clearly, employers play a major part in either assisting or making more difficult a young person's adaptation to working life. The Smith (2000) study found examples of employers who had well-tested methods of settling the novice workers into the organisation, as well as examples of employers who paid no attention to this role. Addressing training of teenage workers more generally, Long (2002) found that around one-third of 19-year-olds from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth in 1999 had received at least a week's structured training in the previous year while 40% said that training had helped them get promoted. Those working in retail and wholesale and accommodation, cafes and restaurants were least satisfied with their training opportunities. These two industry areas are the most common for youth employment (Smith & Green 2001).

An earlier study carried out in England (Cregan 1997b) describes a mutual dependency between employers and young people in what she calls 'non-career' jobs, generally undertaken part time while still at school. Cregan (1997b) maintains that employers make a sufficient investment in training to hold young people in these jobs while the young people build up their 'workplace credentials' while waiting to apply for a 'real' job. Cregan holds a common view of such jobs as 'part-time, low-paid, dead-end' (Cregan 1997a), perhaps based on an arguably outdated and misplaced view that only traditional apprenticed work could be regarded as skilled or worthwhile.

More generally there is a wealth of literature on organisational socialisation, which has some application to the entry of young people to their first formal jobs. These include studies by Miller and Jablin (1991) and Kreitner and Kinicki (1995). Strategies for settling employees into organisations include mentoring (Bova 1987) and induction (Kenney & Reid 1995). Mentoring refers to a more experienced worker taking a less experienced worker under his or her wing by offering assistance and career advice; and induction refers to the formal training given to new staff to explain the procedures of the organisation (Smith 1998, pp.295, 167). As Smith (1998, p.168) points out, induction programs assist new staff in their socialisation into the organisation in a variety of ways, not least being the fact that the induction group forms a ready-made social and support group.

Studies of induction and organisational socialisation more generally, however, do not generally pay specific attention to novice workers in their first jobs. An exception is a duo of recently published American 'how-to' books which give guidance to novice workers (whom they describe as 'new hires') and to their employers (Holton & Naquin 2001a, 2001b). Although somewhat simplistic, and written for college graduates rather than teenage school leavers, these books offer an interesting insight into the processes involved in fitting into initial employment and the mistakes often made both by new workers and by their supervisors.

The steps involved are described as:

- Adopt the right attitudes.
- Adjust your expectations.
- Master breaking-in skills.
- Manage the impressions you make.
- Build effective relationships.
- Become a good follower.
- Understand your organisation's culture.
- Adopt to the organisational system.
- Understand your new-hire role.
- Develop work smarts.
- Master the tasks of your job.
- Acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities you need.

Both books underline the importance of the early months of a worker's career and the potential for misunderstandings between novice workers and their managers.

A point worth examining is employers' views of novice workers as employees. As discussed above, some employers view novice workers as lacking in certain skills and attributes, and yet certain employers continue to recruit large numbers of them. Cregan (1997a, p.8) has summarised earlier British research about the reasons why some employers prefer to recruit young people:

- They are ideal candidates for training up in the company way.
- Some employers distrust qualifications.
- They lack bad habits.
- They learn company culture quickly.
- They are quick learners (especially of information technology).
- Their motivation is high.
- Some companies have a tradition of recruiting young people.
- Young people have a much lower rate of pay.

While there is some belief that young people who enter the labour market later may be more employable, Roberts (1995 cited in Cregan 1999, p.194) maintains that this is essentially a conservative ethos, and is based on a belief that youth alone leads to a lack of work ethic. Cregan (1999) establishes evidence that, in Britain at least, later entry to the labour market does not appear to lead to greater success in finding work.

Conclusion

This review of literature has raised a number of points, which have relevance to the current study. These include the following:

- Employability skills or generic, core or key skills are high on the skills and education agendas in most developed countries.
- The Australian approach has been dominated by industry to a greater extent than a number of other countries.

- Industry needs highly effective workers in order to cope with the lean staffing and competitive environment of the twenty-first century and this has been a major impetus behind industry involvement in the debate.
- There is some underlying disagreement about the appropriate allocation, between the education sector and employers, of the costs and effort involved in the development of employability skills. This tension underpins much of the debate.
- Some employers have a preference for young workers although such workers may not necessarily have well-developed employability skills.
- Employers have a number of strategies for socialising new staff, although there has been little research into the application of these strategies specifically to novice workers.

Research method

This chapter briefly explains the research method used and the reasons why the method was chosen. It also describes the data analysis process and the structure of the report. A literature review was undertaken and contact was made with those engaged in concurrent research in the area of employability skills. This was achieved primarily through a meeting of project managers of generic skills research projects arranged by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) during May 2002 as well as through informal contact with other researchers. Two reference groups were set up: Reference Group A, which consisted of experts in this area and Reference Group B which consisted of teenagers with working experience. These reference groups were consulted at key points in the project: Reference Group A by teleconference, and Reference Group B face to face.

Discussion of research approach

A qualitative research approach was utilised because the research area appeared to be under-explored in the literature. Such an approach allows important themes to be identified, which could then, if required, be tested, in quantitative studies. As Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p.28) note, qualitative researchers can 'learn what the important questions are'. Moreover, workplaces are not homogeneous environments, and a qualitative approach allows 'a perspective that will lead to the description and understanding of phenomena in ways that reflect their complexity' (Guba & Lincoln 1982, p.71). Thus the ways in which employability skills were developed in the different enterprises could be examined in the full context of the enterprise's business and human resource management environment. A case study method was deemed to be the most appropriate technique to enable a full contextualisation and to enable an understanding to be gained of different participants' viewpoints (Yin 1994). Investigating different viewpoints is a form of triangulation and adds to the trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba 1985) of the data.

The study is an example of the case study type known as the collective case study, where several cases are examined. Each case was viewed as being unique and of interest in itself, but there were issues (Stake 1995) which were examined in every case and which were analysed across cases. Patterns across as well as within cases, were sought and discerned.

The study was enriched by the experience of the research team members, who between them had the following experiences:

- working in management roles with school leavers and student workers
- assisting young people in the transition from school and unemployment into employment
- previous research studies of young people starting work and entry-level training
- previous research studies of work experience and structured work placements
- policy and curriculum development for post-compulsory education and training
- parenting teenage children who were first-time workers.

The application of the researchers' own experience represents what Merriam describes as 'the interviewer's knowing enough about the topic to ask meaningful questions' (1988, p.78). As well as such questions eliciting useful data, they also established the researchers' credentials with the participants. They showed that the researchers already had considerable knowledge in the area and enabled discussion to move beyond basic assumptions to more complex issues.

Validation of the findings with the two reference groups enabled the researchers to be reasonably confident that the findings were representative and thus could be construed as broadly consistent with Australian workplaces as a whole. However, it would be dangerous to assume complete representativeness without a large-scale testing of the findings.

Case studies

Potential case study sites were selected and entry negotiated. Case studies were selected as being indicative of working environments in which first-time workers were likely to find themselves. It was not possible to distribute 12 cases across all possible variables, such as industry area, size of enterprise, ownership structure of the enterprise, type of location (rural/urban), composition of workforce, history of employing young people, and so on. On the other hand, the aim of the study was to generate theory, which might be generalisable, and so some attention needed to be paid to representativeness. Therefore Patton's (1989) approach of 'purposive sampling' was utilised. The research findings could thus be expected to provide an initial understanding of novice workers and employability skills, which could form part of a wider body of research.

The advice of the 'adult' reference group (Reference Group A) was sought on the selection of sites. While the project was intended to be undertaken in three states, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, a Queensland case study was added because a group training company was identified which employed large numbers of school-based apprentices and trainees.

The research was carried out during June and July 2002 with the Bakers Delight case study acting as a pilot. The case study sites are shown in table 5. The table indicates whether the employment of novice workers was predominantly of full-time or part-time workers. Some of the case studies are identified by pseudonyms, at the request of the enterprise.

Table 5: Details of case study sites

Employer	Industry area	State	Full-time/part-time novice workers
Superfoods*	Supermarket	NSW	Both
MEGT	GTC	Vic	Only full-time examined
Autolight Manufacturing*	Manufacturing	SA	Only full-time examined
Courier Newspapers*	Newspaper delivery	SA	Part-time
Bakers Delight	Retail food	SA	Both
Portside Group Training*	GTC (ATSI focus)	SA	Both
Market-town Council*	Local government	NSW	Full-time
Hamburger House*	Fast food	Vic	Both
Fiona's Hair Salon	Hairdressing	NSW	Full-time
Supernova Electrical*	Electrical	NSW	Full-time
Sound Fits	Electronics/IT	NSW	Full-time
CADET	GTC	Qld	Part-time

Note: *indicates pseudonym
GTC=group training company
ATSI=Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Two case study enterprises (Market-town Council and Sound Fits) were in rural locations, and one (Fiona's) in a large coastal town. Several of the other case study employers were multi-site within a state or nationally, including rural sites within the organisation.

Within each case study, research was carried out by means of semi-structured interviews (protocols are included at appendix B) and, where appropriate, inspection of company recruitment and induction materials. Staff interviewed were as follows (with slight variations in smaller companies and in group training companies):

- corporate staff such as human resources directors
- site managers
- supervisors of novice workers
- novice workers
- co-workers working alongside novice workers.

In the cases of MEGT, CADET and Portside group training companies, visits to two host employers were carried out, as well as visits to the head office. In group training companies, the host employers 'lease' the apprentices and trainees from the company, which remains the legal employer. The Portside group training company case study was selected specifically to examine novice workers who were Indigenous, as it was felt that such workers might face particular challenges, and Portside employed a relatively high percentage of Indigenous young people.

Descriptive framework for the study

An important task was to agree on the descriptive framework of employability skills, which would be used to underpin the research. Reference Group A decided on the use of the framework which had been developed during a research project undertaken by the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2002). The framework contains attributes as well as skills:

Attributes

- loyalty
- commitment
- honesty and integrity
- enthusiasm
- reliability
- personal presentation
- common sense
- positive self-esteem
- a sense of humour
- a balanced attitude to work and home life
- an ability to deal with pressure
- motivation
- adaptability.

Skills

- *communication* skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations across employees and customers
- *team work* skills that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes
- *problem-solving* skills that contribute to productive outcomes
- *initiative and enterprise* skills that contribute to innovative outcomes
- *planning and organising* skills that contribute to long- and short-term strategic planning
- *self-management* skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth
- *learning skills* that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes
- *technology* skills that contribute to effective execution of tasks.

(Business Council of Australia & Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2002)

The teenagers in Reference Group B largely agreed with the framework, although they thought that not all young workers would understand the term 'integrity', and they would have liked to have seen the addition of 'punctuality', 'trustworthiness' and 'the right attitude'. During the case study interviews the researchers ensured that they had these issues in mind.

Analysis and writing up

Reports on each case study were written up individually, using the four research questions as a framework, and then the four researchers, who were located in three different locations in two states, met for a workshop where thematic analysis was carried out. As well as the themes identified in the research questions and used as the basis for the case study protocols, additional themes, brought up by the participants, were found to have arisen during the research process. These two types of themes, 'etic' and 'emic' respectively (Stake 1995, p.20), were both used in the analysis.

Following completion of the draft final report, the report was circulated to reference group members for validation. Comments were incorporated into the final report.

Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The chapter is structured around the major research questions, which were:

- Why is it that some organisations recruit large numbers of novice workers and how do such employers view young workers?
- What processes are in place at corporate, managerial and supervisory levels to train these novice workers in employability skills?
- How do novice workers themselves view, and engage in learning about employability skills though employment?
- What are some good models of employability skills training and how can the processes of employability skills training be communicated to, and utilised by, other employers who currently have less tolerance for young people and less expertise in developing employability skills?

A number of additional areas, which arose during interviews, are also discussed. These include:

- employability skills that were most valued
- other sites (apart from workplaces) for development of employability skills
- ways in which managers and co-workers learned how to develop employability skills in novice workers
- comparison of the employability skills required for student part-time jobs and full-time jobs.

Why do employers recruit novice workers?

Senior staff at the case study sites were asked why they employed novice workers. As might be expected, a range of reasons was given. These reasons varied for each enterprise and included:

- low cost of young workers
- youthful exuberance
- mouldability
- technological skills and up-to-date knowledge
- freshness
- obligations
- enterprise skill mix
- covering span of operating hours
- tradition
- development of existing staff

- organisational image
- physical fitness.

Some employers placed a premium upon costs (sometimes this was explicitly mentioned and at other times it was assumed), others upon the attributes of young workers, and others upon the importance of young people to their company's image. It was clear the nature of the business affected these differences profoundly. For example, businesses with high labour costs and low profit margins were influenced by the relatively low cost of employing young teenagers, especially where the tasks were simple and repetitive and therefore high levels of skill and experience were not needed. But it was equally clear that reasons were not simple and one-dimensional.

Cost

Some sites indicated that lower employment costs was one of the reasons affecting the hiring of novice staff. In addition to employer subsidies available through apprenticeships and traineeships, and additional subsidies for certain disadvantaged groups, young people cost less to employ under certain awards simply by virtue of their age. This factor was particularly important in industries where labour costs formed a high proportion of total costs, for example, fast food and retail.

Youthful exuberance

The enthusiasm and exuberance possessed by novice workers were seen to bring energy to a workplace and invigorate other employees. In some cases, for example at Bakers Delight, it was seen as important to have staff with these characteristics interacting with customers.

Mouldability

Most of the enterprises expressed the view that they perceived novice workers as being 'mouldable' because they were able to be trained and inculcated into the work habits and culture of the enterprise. They did not bring bad habits with them. This was mentioned for example, by Sound Fits and by CADET Group Training Company.

Technological skills and up-to-date knowledge

Novice workers were cited as possessing high levels of skills with technology and this was sometimes a factor in hiring decisions. In one case, a manager reflected that these skills were not sufficiently appreciated by the company. In addition, novice workers sometimes brought new knowledge to an organisation. Playford Council (Portside Group Training Company[3]) liked to employ apprentices because they brought the new materials they were studying at institutes of technical and further education (TAFE) back into the organisation.

Freshness

A number of sites indicated that employing novice workers introduced 'new blood' into the organisation which also had the effect of keeping staff 'in touch' with a new generation. At Playford Council (Portside Group Training Company) it was mentioned that new staff, even inexperienced ones, could think of new and better ways of doing things.

[3] In this chapter, references to group training company host employers include the name (or pseudonym) of the host employer followed by the name (or pseudonym) of the group training company.

Obligations

Some employers employed novice workers because of social and/or industry obligations to provide opportunities for young people. Frankston Hospital (MEGT Group Training Company) was an example of this, where the apprentice cook was not really expected to contribute anything to productivity but was employed because of the belief that apprentices needed to be trained within the industry.

Enterprise skill mix

A number of sites indicated that they employed novice workers for jobs which did not need high levels of skills. This was implicit, for example, at Courier Newspapers where the low level of skills in delivering newspapers, was appropriate to young people in their early teens.

Covering span of operating hours

The range of hours worked in an enterprise or industry was cited as a reason to employ novice workers because they were more flexible and able to participate in operations which spanned up to 24 hours a day, seven days a week in some cases. Retail (Superfoods) and fast food (Hamburger House) were cases in point.

Tradition

A tradition of taking on novice workers in some enterprises was cited as a continuing reason to employ them. Supernova Electrical and Sound Fits were cases where the apprenticeship system provided this tradition in the traditional trade areas.

Development of existing staff

Flow-on benefits for existing staff were also cited as reasons to employ novice workers, as they provided opportunities for supervisory experience and the development of management and training skills amongst other staff. Staff also enjoyed the challenge of developing young people into effective workers.

Organisational image

Employing novice workers was also seen as necessary to maintain the company image in the market and the community more broadly. This reason, cited by Bakers Delight, is in line with the reasons many organisations give for hosting school work experience students (Smith & Harris 2001).

Physical fitness

In some enterprises the work was physically demanding and young people were viewed as being able to maintain the required pace. This feature was mentioned by Hamburger House.

How do employers view novice workers?

Staff at the research sites were asked to identify both positive and negative attributes of novice workers. Amongst those interviewed, novice workers were viewed as possessing a range of positive and negative attributes. A summary of those views is shown in table 6.

It should be stressed that while there was a greater number of different negative attributes identified across the sites, this did not suggest that novice workers were viewed more negatively than positively by those interviewed. The fact that these enterprises employed novice workers

suggested that they found in general, that positives outweighed negatives. Neither the positive nor the negative attributes were seen to apply to all novice workers; some respondents made it clear that there were great variations between individual novice workers.

Differences in attitudes towards novice workers are to be expected. The differences amongst employers and their staff no doubt reflects their experiences with novice workers. As these experiences also affect the way employers and their staff deal with novice workers, it is likely that the particular approaches to develop employability skills amongst novice workers would be influenced by the attitudes held by employers and their staff.

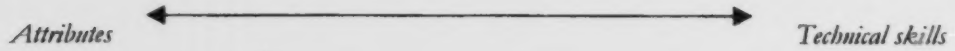
Table 6: Positive and negative attributes of novice workers, as cited in the case studies

Positive attributes	Negative attributes
enthusiasm	absenteeism/lateness
willingness to learn	home and personal problems
technology skills	lack of initiative
inquisitiveness	lack of work ethic
creativity	lack of commitment and ability to follow through
career oriented	unrealistic career inspirations
grateful/wanting to impress	inability to adjust to work, for example, the length of day, lack of structure, the shock of work
keen/hardworking	laziness
no bad work habits	inappropriate parental intervention
able to manage pressure	poor communication skills
'mouldable' and trainable	easily distracted
not disillusioned by previous work	know-it-all attitude
	shyness and nervousness
	lack of understanding of the purpose of work
	lack of independent means of transport
	lack of basic skills in hygiene and cleanliness

It is also worth noting that there is some inconsistency between the reasons given by employers for employing novice workers and the attributes that they value amongst novice workers. In particular, employers only list a subset of positive attributes as reasons they employ novice workers, that is, not all of the positive attributes they see in novice workers are mentioned as reasons for recruiting them.

How do employers view employability skills?

Respondents' comments during discussions indicated that employability skills were conceptualised as being located at different points along a continuum that moved from personal characteristics to skills identified as being clearly technical in nature. That continuum is represented graphically below, and it was found across the sites that employability skills can be situated anywhere on this continuum.



In some cases, skills such as communication were extremely important. This was the case, for example, at Hamburger House where they could almost be classed as technical skills. In other cases, however, some of the employability skills were not vital to the performance of the technical aspects of the job. For example, communication skills were not as important in work sites where there was little interaction with the public, such as the works depot at Market-town Council or

Autolights Manufacturing. There may also have been some variation with the complexity of the technical aspects of the job. Again using Hamburger House as an example, the manual and cognitive skills required were very low, leaving the skill areas covered by employability skills as the major area permitting development and allowing for differentiation between employees. At Sound Fits, by contrast, the novice worker's job required fairly high-level manual and cognitive skills.

In some case studies, the novice workers and the other staff were asked if they could separate out employability skills from the technical skills involved in the novice worker's work. In most cases people stated that it was difficult to separate out employability skills from technical skills; however, it was notable that all respondents were able to identify those employability skills most valued in their enterprises. These findings are reported in the next section.

What employability skills are most valued?

At each research site, all respondents were asked to identify what employability skills were most valued at that site in the jobs for which novice workers were recruited. Table 7 identifies the employability skills most valued in each of ten of the case studies for the types of jobs undertaken by that enterprise's novice workers. The table displays the skills most valued by the different stakeholders within the case studies, enabling comparison between similar roles as well as between stakeholders within a case study. For example, the views of supervisors in the different case studies can be compared.

In compiling table 7 the following steps were taken to enable the data to be presented in a table:

- Where more than one respondent in each category was interviewed, the responses were aggregated to give a composite picture.
- In the group training company case studies, responses from respondents in the same category working for different host employers were also aggregated.
- In the MEGT Group Training Company case study, the head office staff's responses were entered under the category 'HR manager'.

While table 7 is interesting, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions from it. Because interviewees were not asked to provide, for example, the three most important attributes and skills, there is no direct comparability between the responses of those interviewed. Some interviewees nominated a long list and others just a few key skills. Probably the clearest findings are that reliability is a key attribute followed at some distance by sense of humour and enthusiasm; and team work and communication are the key *skills*. The lack of 'popularity' of some *attributes* and skills, such as common sense, among respondents, was a little surprising.

Reasons for the lack of pattern in the results could be attributable to the valuing of employability skills not being a major focus of the study, hence the researchers did not allocate a great deal of time to close questioning in this area. Moreover, it seemed apparent to researchers during questioning that varying levels of sophistication and understanding of workplace processes affected the responses of the participants.

As might be expected, some attributes and skills were more valued at some sites than at others. For example, reliability was mentioned by all participants at Autolights Manufacturing and motivation by three out of four participants at Courier Newspapers, presumably in each case because of the particular requirements of the job. Autolights was a manufacturing plant where attendance was a problem. The job of newspaper delivery required the very young workers to motivate themselves to carry out their rounds. Learning skills was mentioned by all participants at Superfoods and this was perhaps because of the attention to training at that site. Planning and organising was mentioned by all participants at MEGT, perhaps because of the nature of the hospitality industry where the host employers were located.

Table 7: **Employability skills most valued at ten of the case study sites, by the different types of worker interviewed**

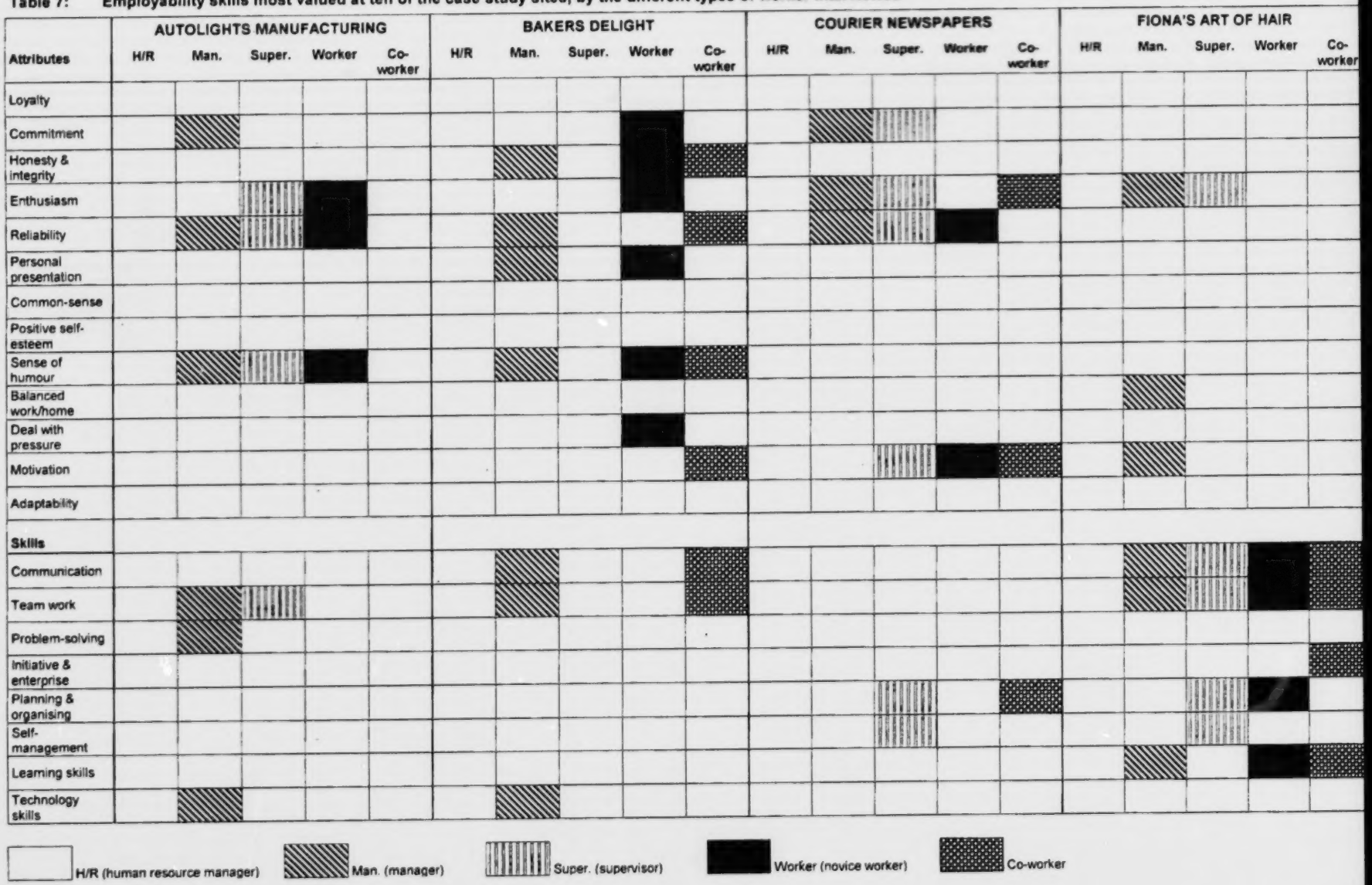


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Table 7: **Employability skills most valued at ten of the case study sites, by the different types of worker interviewed (contd.)**

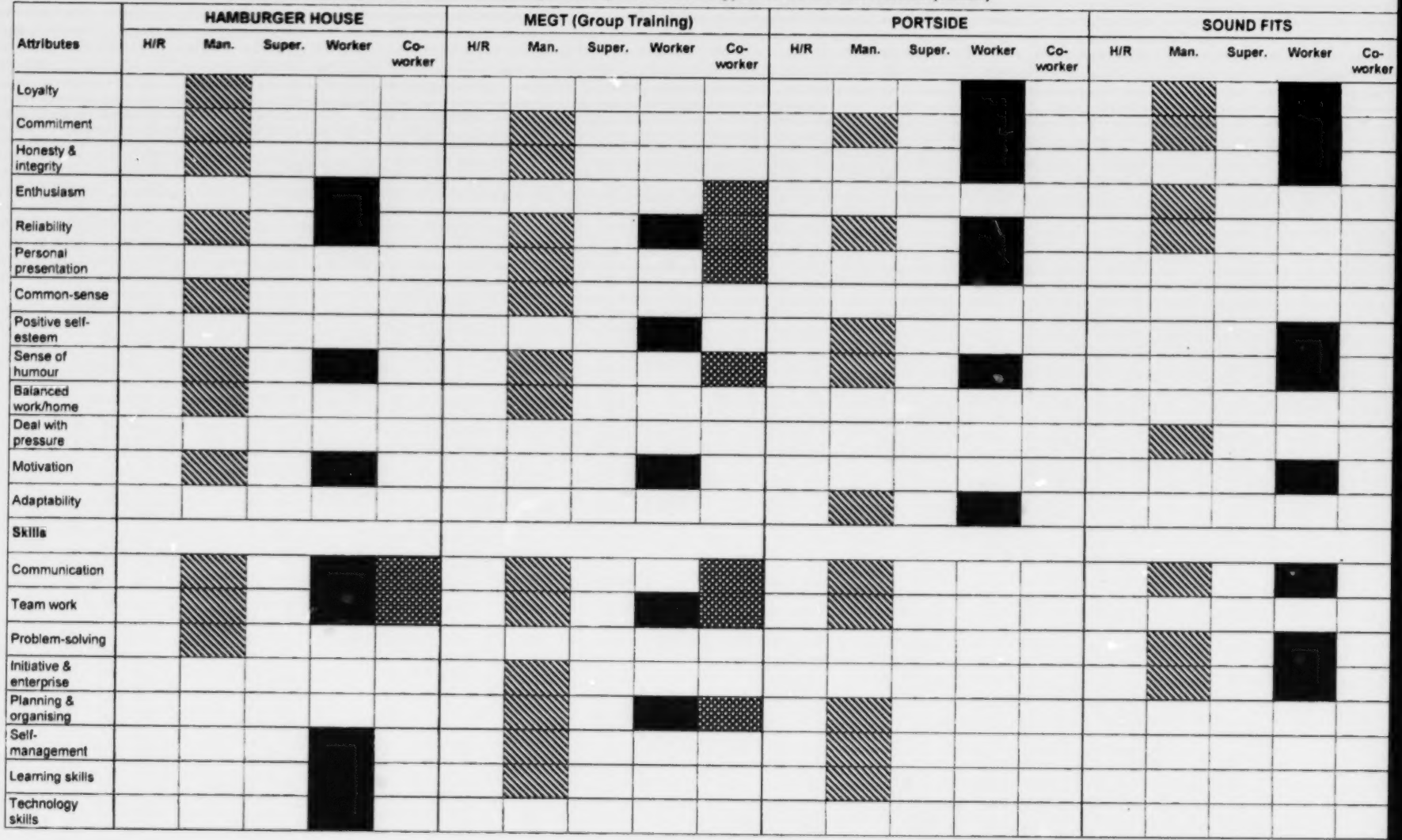

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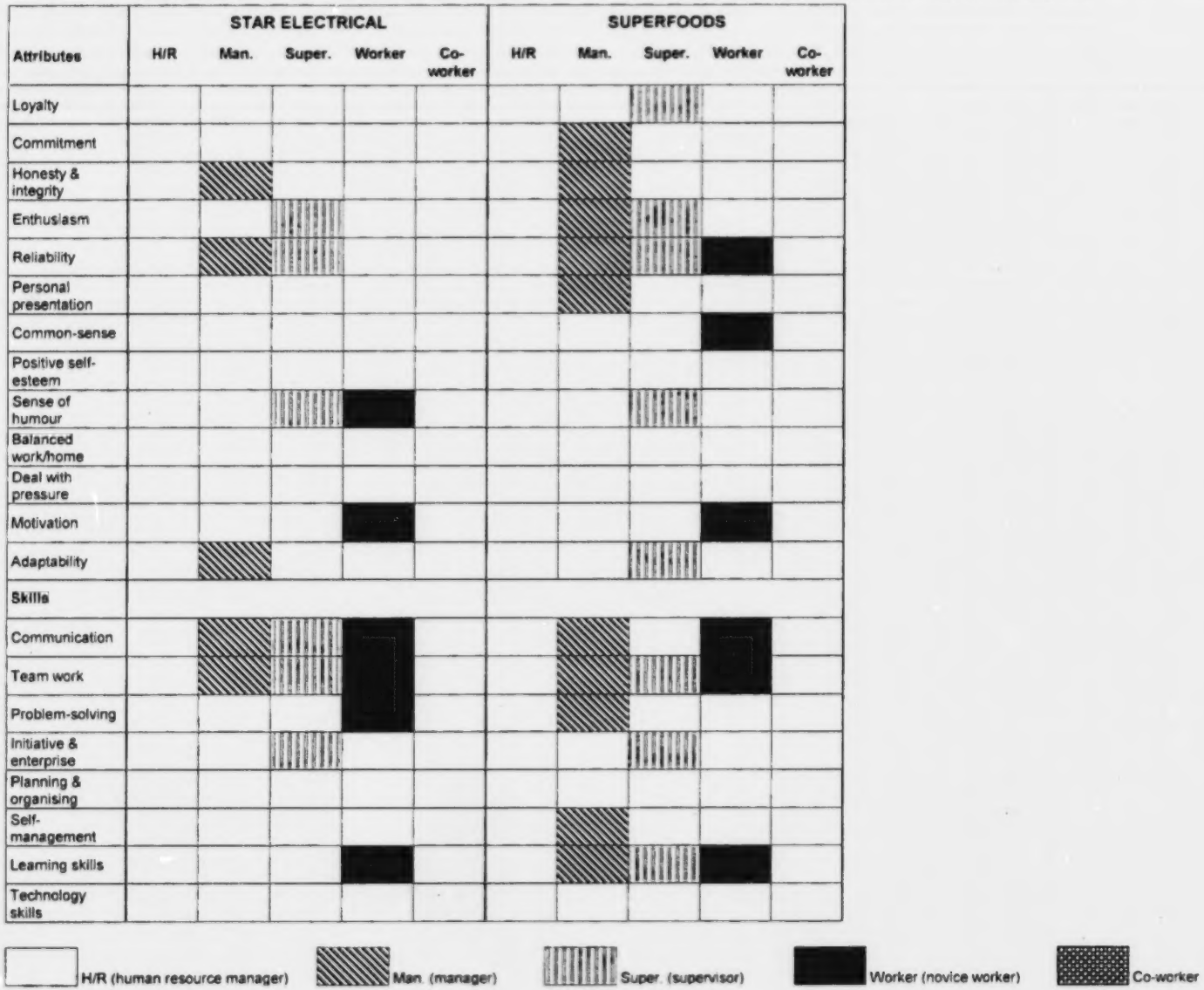
Table 7: Employability skills most valued at ten of the case study sites, by the different types of worker interviewed (contd.)



There did not appear to be consistent differences among levels of workers in the number and nature of employability skills and attributes which were valued. For example at Bakers Delight, the novice workers appeared to consider they needed a wider range of attributes than did their managers. The young newspaper deliverers, on the other hand, considered fewer skills and attributes were required in their work than did their managers. Responses could depend as much upon individual differences as on differences among levels of workers and would need to be tested quantitatively for firm conclusions to be drawn.

In two of the case studies—Market-town Council and CADET Group Training Company—respondents were not given the Business Council of Australia–Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry list to comment on. They were invited to nominate their own list of employability skills which were important in the job under discussion. The responses did not differ greatly from the Business Council of Australia–Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry list, although responses such as 'happy', 'keen' 'willing' and 'bright' 'vibrant' and a 'fun person' were perhaps not fully covered by the Business Council of Australia–Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry attributes of 'enthusiasm' and 'motivation'. Neither were the responses 'a hard worker' or 'have a work ethic' quite covered by the list. However, these discrepancies were relatively minor.

Employability skills and recruitment

While the study was not designed to look at the role that employability skills played in selection decisions, employers in several case studies wished to discuss this issue. It was clear that they were more used to discussing employability skills in relation to recruitment than in relation to training. The time employers devoted to telling the researchers about this issue indicated that it was of importance to them. Therefore the results are briefly reported here.

Generally young people needed to possess some employability skills before employers were willing to recruit them. Table 8 lists the recruitment strategies which were mentioned by case study enterprises.

Table 8: Recruitment strategies employed by some of the case study enterprises

Bakers Delight	Required a high level of pre-existing employability skills. Rigorous selection process: handing in resume, interview, testing, oral presentation, and stress test.
Steak Bar (CADET GTC)	Two days trial to assess applicants
Fiona's Hair	Assessed school students during work placements
Hamburger House	Interview evaluation form assessed many of the employability skills on a numerical scale. Parents involved in recruitment process.
MEGT GTC	Interview and screening at GTC followed by interview at host employer; pre-employment courses available in some industry areas
Courier Newspapers	Selected on neatness of application form and presence of references
Autolights Manufacturing	Staff recruited through a labour-hire company, which tested on a number of generic and manual dexterity tests.
Supernova Electrical	Selected on the basis of the 'right attitude'
Portside GTC	Did not take on young people 'who were trouble'. Selected on basis of interview, background checks, personal knowledge, and attendance at school, pre-vocational courses.

Note: GTC=group training company

Few of the employers expected applicants to possess perfectly developed employability skills. Hamburger House for example, knew that most of its new staff would be poorly organised and would have relatively poor communication skills. However, there was generally a base level of employability skills that successful applicants were required to reach. MEGT Group Training Company commented that they only forwarded about half of their applicants for consideration to host employers because they did not reach this base level. As the MEGT manager put it: 'When

you have a kid who comes in who slouches and chews and swears you would never put them forward to the host employer'.

The base level was not comparable in all cases. Some companies like Bakers Delight were more selective, only accepting a small proportion of their applicants. In a number of instances certain types of applicants were viewed more favourably than others. For example at Bakers Delight, which sought mainly part-time student workers, one of the managers found that those from a rural background, from families who practised a religious faith, and those who studied drama tended to be good employees. In general Bakers Delight targeted university-bound young people. Employer preconceptions could work against certain groups. For example, the field officer at Portside Group Training Company commented that some people had erroneous opinions about the work ethic of Indigenous young people. However, no instances of such beliefs were uncovered during the study. Some employers routinely recruited new staff who were related to, or friends with, existing staff. Such staff were likely to fit in more readily. They would also, presumably, have realistic expectations about what the job would be like. Such practices can, of course, be regarded as unintentionally discriminatory since employment opportunities are thereby essentially limited to certain social groups (Grint 1998).

What processes are used to develop employability skills?

The 'adult' respondents at each site were asked about the approaches used to develop employability skills amongst novice workers. These processes varied, as would be expected, from formally structured programs with supporting resources, to ad hoc informal approaches which relied on individuals and their attitudes towards novice workers.

It is worth noting that these approaches were not solely used to develop employability skills. In most cases, the processes were primarily in place to develop a novice worker's technical skills; that is, to enable appropriate performance of job tasks, and these were seen as having a secondary role in the development of employability skills. The processes can be summarised under the following headings:

- recruitment and induction
- buddy systems
- mentoring
- organisational socialisation
- valuing training
- trained supervisors
- staff meetings
- staff assessments and performance appraisal systems
- mistake management
- conflict resolution
- disciplinary approaches
- rotation of tasks
- allocating increased responsibility
- badging
- management systems.

Recruitment/induction

Both recruitment and induction were seen as being relevant to the development of employability skills amongst novice workers. However, mechanisms involved in recruitment more often involved selection on the basis of employability skills (as discussed earlier), rather than applying explicit approaches to develop them. There were exceptions to this; for example, at Hamburger House the interview explicitly involved discussion of expectations about availability for work and other issues. The group training companies appeared to include discussion of, and advice on, employability skills during the recruitment and selection processes.

Induction processes however, were more relevant and almost universal, variously involving:

- booklets
- structured workshops
- formal training
- role plays
- one-to-one interviews.

In these cases, the development of employability skills was either explicitly addressed, or implicitly presumed to have resulted from the particular approach. At CADET Group Training Company for example, novice workers (trainees) were provided with two lists—'Employer expectations' and 'Ten commandments for customers'. These materials were used as exemplars of attitudes and behaviours, and were part of a system of fortnightly monitoring by group training company staff during the first month of employment.

Some novice workers were seen to need more induction than others. Hamburger House, for example, paid a great deal of attention to induction, perhaps because most of their novice workers were very young (15 or younger). Playford Council (Portside Group Training Company) routinely recruited Indigenous apprentices and found them to be shyer than other young people, hence requiring more care in induction.

Buddy systems

At most sites, efforts were made to partner or 'buddy' novice workers with others. These were variously co-workers or supervisors/team leaders, depending on the organisation of work in the enterprise and the skills of available personnel. The use of the buddy system often relied on the skills and attitudes of the 'buddy' who became responsible for integrating the novice worker and ensuring they displayed appropriate work habits and behaviours. Various approaches were used by 'buddies', and these are considered in more detail in the next section of this chapter ('techniques used in individual interactions'). At Bakers Delight, for example, the manager of the Hilton Bakery commented that the most effective way to develop the employability skills of novice workers was to team novice workers with an experienced staff member, not just any staff member, but one that the manager considered to have excellent work habits who could model the job.

Mentoring

Some enterprises had informal mentoring arrangements in place that sought to develop appropriate work habits and behaviours in novice workers. The selection of mentors was considered an important aspect of this approach, with factors such as age and personality addressed by employers. At Kaylene Krantz (Portside Group Training Company) for example, novice workers at some workplaces were mentored by co-workers who provided one-to-one guidance in a less intimidating fashion than might be the case if managers took on this role. This arrangement was also seen to benefit the mentor, who in one case was enrolled in the Certificate IV in Frontline Management.

Organisational socialisation

Steps to acculturate novice workers to their workplaces were seen as relevant to the development of employability skills, particularly team work and communication skills. While these steps were predominantly a feature of induction processes, workplace familiarisation also took place through the use of social events which were part of an ensemble of approaches to introduce novice workers to an enterprise. At Superfoods for example, great care was taken during induction to introduce novice workers into the history and culture of the organisation, with its associated tradition and commitment to quality service and products. It was felt that these steps would develop the required attitudes amongst novice workers and assist them to adopt the values that the organisation espoused.

Valuing of training

At a number of sites, the development and maintenance of a training culture was seen as relevant to developing the employability of novice workers, particularly in terms of their commitment and learning skills. It was felt that, by emphasising learning, novice workers would be encouraged to consider their own skills development, which would include employability skills. At Market-town Council for example, novice workers were involved in an ongoing training regime as part of their induction program. While other staff were also given opportunities to undertake training, the council was supportive of the off-the-job training requirements of its apprentices and sought to develop a culture in the organisation that valued training. There were some variations in the extent to which employability skills were addressed in the training. At Superfoods, for example, there were modules in the traineeship which explicitly addressed employability skills such as communication and teamwork. In other environments, such as Supernova Electrical, employability skills were not included in formal training but were addressed in an ad hoc manner.

Trained supervisors

At a number of sites, specific training of supervisors was seen as a way of ensuring that supervisors had the skills to assist the development of employability skills amongst novice workers that they were responsible for. At Autolights Manufacturing, novice workers received on-the-job training from other staff who had completed an on-the-job instructor course. The instructor training related to the development of both technical skills and employability skills of novice workers. Training of supervisors at Hamburger House included explicit attention to their role in developing employability skills in their young staff.

Staff meetings

Staff meetings were used at a number of sites to create opportunities to develop teamwork and focus on operational issues involving the deployment of employability skills. At Fiona's Art of Hair, weekly staff meetings were used to focus on the behaviours and attitudes expected in the salon. Work-related issues and problems were discussed in an open way, and where time permitted, informal case studies and scenarios were used to develop employability skills, such as the ability to deal with pressure, as well as procedural skills. At one of the Hamburger House sites, new staff were invited to management meetings in an explicit attempt to develop their ability to understand the 'big picture' of the restaurant, and thus develop their loyalty, commitment and teamwork.

Staff assessments and performance appraisal systems

Three enterprises mentioned formal staff appraisal systems which, in some instances, involved self-assessment by novice workers. These approaches were seen as being relevant to the development of employability skills through either explicitly using assessment criteria related to employability skills, or indirectly through foregrounding the issue of skills development and satisfactory work

performance. At Supernova Electrical for example, novice workers were involved in a formal assessment and performance review system which used self-assessment and assessments by supervisors and site managers against criteria that included both technical skills and employability skills.

Mistake management

At some sites, mistakes were explicitly recognised as providing a means to address aspects of a novice worker's performance, aspects that often drew attention to the deployment of employability skills. At Sound Fits for example, the owner–managers were consciously tolerant of mistakes, and aware of the difficulties young people experienced in the transition from school to work. While young workers were expected to improve following feedback, most of the employers commented that they expected new workers to make mistakes sometimes. The ability of an organisation to tolerate mistakes and allow employees to learn from them is often cited as one of the characteristics of a learning organisation (Field & Ford 1995).

Conflict resolution

At a number of the enterprises, a mixture of formal and informal mechanisms for conflict resolution were considered relevant to the development of employability skills. These measures involved pastoral care and the use of field workers, parental involvement (welcomed or not welcomed) and escalation procedures involving supervisors and managers. These processes were seen as relevant, as many of the issues surrounding the points of conflict related to the inappropriate deployment of employability skills and attitudes. At Supernova Electrical for example, the operations manager had introduced a system through which any conflicts on site would be stepped through a process involving supervisors, site foreman, managers, and ultimately parents, if the issue was serious enough to warrant their involvement. Through this approach, elements of the employability skills of novice workers were emphasised and highlighted where relevant during the conflict resolution process as a means of preventing further conflicts on site. At MEGT the group training company field workers helped the apprentices and trainees deal with conflicts with their host employers.

Disciplinary approaches

For similar reasons, disciplinary approaches were also seen as being relevant to the development of employability skills. The use of penalties, a lack of shifts, and simply 'putting them back in their box' were among techniques used to bring attention to the inappropriate deployment of employability skills and attitudes. At Bakers Delight for example, a high standard of performance was required, and if another novice worker showed more energy and drive, then co-workers were also expected to improve or they would lose shifts. Similarly, if they chose not to turn up for a shift, they were not offered work for the following two weeks.

Rotation of tasks

Several of the enterprises sought to rotate novice workers so that they would be exposed to different staff members as well as a different range of work tasks and work systems. It was also seen as a way of exposing novice workers to the 'big picture'. While generally not used specifically to develop skills, there was a general expectation that rotation would develop the employability skills of novice workers. At Hamburger House for example, managers used this technique when novice workers were observed becoming less enthusiastic after the first few weeks of work. Training in new tasks was seen as an explicit strategy to keep novice workers motivated while helping them to understand how their role fitted in with the total operation. Managers at Hamburger House were aware that when novice workers were given a wider range of tasks they learned more quickly.

Allocating increasing responsibility

All sites used approaches that sought to gradually increase the level of responsibility for novice workers. This approach was seen not only to develop work skills but also to provide novice workers with opportunities to develop related employability skills. At Sound Fits for example, the owner–managers maintained fairly close supervision and allocated jobs that were suitable, with an appropriate level of difficulty. This was balanced however by a recognition that a broad range of tasks was needed to ensure that motivation and interest in the job was maintained. At Property Co. (CADET Group Training Company) in a school-based traineeship the trainee was moved from basic tasks such as doing mailouts to answering the phone and typing.

Badging

A simple technique mentioned at one site was to use badges to identify novice workers. The expectation amongst employers and supervisors was that clients and customers would be more tolerant of the level of service and indeed encourage novice workers. In this way, it was felt that novice workers might be more comfortable in their work environment and thus more likely to grow as individuals and thus deploy appropriate employability skills. At Bakers Delight new staff members wore a trainee badge for the first two to three weeks of work.

Management systems

A range of management systems was also used to support the development of employability skills. In some cases the use of key performance indicators (KPIs) for supervisors and managers related to providing the support to novice workers or ensuring the transition of novice workers. Handbooks and other company documentation explicitly referred to developing specific employability skills. Steak Bar used the 'One minute manager' books to assist their supervisors in managing young workers. The techniques used to introduce novice workers into a workgroup were seen as crucial to developing employability skills, with many sites using both formal and informal approaches. At Superfoods, department supervisors were managed under a system of key performance indicators as part of their performance management system. These indicators identified performance outcomes that covered novice workers, and how their work behaviours were managed and developed.

Overview of the processes across the enterprises

Table 9 depicts the processes which were mentioned in the case study enterprises. It should be noted that where an approach is not shown, it does not necessarily mean that it was not utilised in that enterprise. Respondents were not asked specifically about each approach, so the table merely represents the responses which were volunteered.

Table 9 shows that the most commonly mentioned approaches were:

- induction
- buddying
- valuing training
- allocating increased responsibility
- management systems
- task rotation.

Table 9: Approaches to the development of employability skills mentioned at different sites

Approach	Site											
	Sound Fits	Bakers Delight	CADET GTC	Fiona's Art of Hair	Hamburger House	MEGT	Superfoods	Courier Newspapers	Autolights	Supernova Electrical	Market-Town Council	Portside GTC
Recruitment/induction												
Buddy/modelling systems												
Mentoring												
Organisational socialisation												
Valuing of training												
Trained supervisors												
Staff meetings												
Staff assessments & appraisal systems												
Mistake management												
Conflict resolution												
Disciplinary approaches												
Rotation												
Tolerance and respect												
Allocating increased responsibility												
Badging												
Management systems												

Note: GTC= Group training company

While some approaches were probably used in other enterprises, with staff omitting to mention them, it is likely that those which were mentioned were regarded as most important. Induction and buddying/modelling were used in nearly all cases. The only two cases where buddying was not mentioned were Sounds Fits and Courier Newspapers. At Sounds Fits there were only two management staff in addition to the novice worker. Thus there was no one with whom to buddy. Sound Fits was also the only site with no formal induction. At Courier Newspapers there was an induction process but no buddying, although it might have been possible to buddy new delivery boys or girls with those already doing the job.

What techniques do staff use in individual interactions with novice workers?

Amongst the case study sites, one-to-one support and direction emerged as a major vehicle for developing the employability skills of novice workers. If they had direct contact with novice workers, respondents were asked to describe the techniques they used to develop employability skills. The list below highlights the main elements of these approaches. The approaches were seen to contribute to the overall development of employability skills rather than relating to specific skills. Employability skills were not addressed separately in the research. Tolerance and respect for novice workers emerged as key factors in all discussions.

- *Encouraging and giving praise one to one:* at Superfoods effective supervisors were judged to be those that took time to encourage and give praise to novice workers. This approach was felt to motivate novice workers and encourage them to deploy their employability skills in a more confidant and mature way because they believed they would be praised and receive encouragement for doing so.
- *Talking and making conversation in an effort to make them feel comfortable:* staff at Bayview (MEGT) suggested that they made a point to have an informal discussion with novice workers at least once a day. They also selected appropriate co-workers who were prepared to spend time talking with novice workers during which time tips about work could be passed on.
- *Introducing them to the group:* at Hamburger House supervisors and managers both recognised the importance of effectively introducing novice workers into the work group on site. An additional mechanism to support this was to hire and induct novice workers in groups so that they were able to develop relationships with co-workers prior to moving to the workplace. One Hamburger House manager deliberately left groups of new staff unsupervised for a while during the induction process, making an excuse to be called away, enabling the young people to chat informally amongst themselves.
- *Showing interest in them as individuals:* at Supernova Electrical one site manager made a point of developing a rapport with novice workers by maintaining interest in their personal lives and how they were progressing on the job. In other case studies, staff clearly had a detailed knowledge about, and interest in, the personal and home lives of the novice workers with whom they worked.
- *Showing respect:* at Bayview (MEGT), novice workers were shown respect by managers and other co-workers in a way that encouraged the novice workers and eased their transition into employment.
- *Showing concern:* at Kaylene Krantz (Portside Group Training Company), the manager believed she had responsibility to nurture novice workers and tried to demonstrate considerable empathy for young people. She believed that novice workers wanted to be guided, directed and developed, an attitude that was shared by Portside's staff who sought to empower young people through their support and field services to host employers.
- *Setting clear limits:* at Bakers Delight for example, franchisees were focussed on giving novice workers clear guidance on what standards were required at work. Novice workers were instructed that strict systems were in place that had to be adhered to.

- *Working alongside novice workers and doing the same job:* at Frankston Hospital (MEGT), there was no overt sense of hierarchy in the workplace, with supervisors working alongside novice workers, in some cases doing the same job, getting the novice workers to tell stories about their day and showing them easier ways of doing particular tasks.
- Providing good quality on-the-job training using techniques such as scaffolding, or consistently applying techniques such as EDI (explain, demonstrate, imitate): at Steak Bar (CADET GTC), supervisors and managers used a variety of techniques to introduce novice workers to new tasks, actively discussed managing staff within developmental levels and used management resources and tools to manage work and train staff.
- Socialising to share experiences, but using a scale of familiarity from coffee/tea/cigarette breaks to drinks after work to BBQs: at Hamburger House for example, supervisors and managers joined novice staff on breaks, while at Sound Fits, the novice worker was invited to help the manager move house. These varying social interactions were seen as important mechanisms for letting novice workers feel part of the team and valued as an individual as well as a worker.
- *Modelling correct behaviour and setting a good example:* at Hamburger House novice workers were placed with senior staff who modelled correct behaviour. These staff were judged to have 'the right attitude' and were popular with co-workers. Similarly, at Superfoods, supervisors who worked directly with novice workers were conscious of needing to set a good example and show novice workers how to do the job.
- *Encouraging humour:* at Sound Fits humour was seen as an important tool in ensuring that the novice worker was not alienated in the workplace. It was seen to be particularly relevant in situations where mistakes had been made or where the novice worker needed to be 'brought into line'. The use of humour defused such situations and contributed to the novice worker feeling at ease in the workplace.
- *Giving tips on how to do the job better and what shortcuts work:* at Fiona's Art of Hair novice workers were rotated amongst the junior and senior stylists in order to develop an understanding of different ways of doing the job and a range of shortcuts to performing particular tasks. As each stylist had different approaches, it was felt novice workers would develop a more comprehensive understanding of the job and develop a broader repertoire of skills.
- *Setting clear targets and giving appropriate feedback:* at Superfoods effective supervisors were judged to be those who took time to set clear targets and to describe what was required by a task. By following this up with appropriate feedback, novice workers were encouraged to deploy their employability skills in a more confident manner.

This variety of techniques was used to varying degrees at each of the sites. Those individuals identified by novice workers as being the best skilled at developing employability skills were those who deployed the greatest number of these techniques.

While some of these techniques were not explicitly related to developing generic skills, young workers were more likely to develop these skills if these techniques were used. For example, involving the novice workers in out-of-work activities was likely to increase loyalty, commitment and positive self-esteem; introducing new workers to the group was likely to increase communication skills and teamwork. In other words, these one-to-one interactions created a climate in which employability skills were likely to be developed to an optimal level. Without such interactions, employability skills development would be considerably truncated.

How did the staff learn how to develop employability skills in novice workers?

The wide range of techniques and methods used to develop employability skills in novice workers demands high levels of skill from the managers and co-workers involved. These staff were asked how they had obtained such skills. In some cases some of the required skills to work effectively with novice workers were acquired through formal training or education, in areas including

management, supervision and vocational education and training. For example, some staff had undertaken degrees (on their own initiative), had workplace training qualifications or had undertaken company courses. Management staff at Hamburger House, for example, took courses in team leadership and supervision. Moreover, in the same workplace, all staff were given training in working in a team so that co-workers as well as managers gained some skills in handling other people, which could be useful in helping to develop novice workers. At the time of the study, Hamburger House was revising its training systems to provide better support for novice workers. Several staff said that reflecting on their own experience as novice workers helped them to understand how to handle such workers themselves. In a number of instances staff were emphatic that they were determined not to treat novice workers the same way they had been. In some cases being a parent was also cited as a good training ground for developing novice workers, as was observing how more experienced staff dealt with young workers.

In a number of instances the development of employability skills in young workers was a central feature of the workplace. Hamburger House, Superfoods and Supernova Electrical were cases in point. Here staff simply became enculturated into the practice of developing younger workers. Furthermore, at Hamburger House the performance management system provided for managers to be judged on their success in developing their new staff, and hence it was a skill that they were required to develop, or fail in their own jobs.

Finally, the provision of opportunities for feedback enabled managers and co-workers to gauge how well they were performing as developers of employability skills in younger staff. Such feedback happened through regular staff meetings, through scheduled meetings with the novice workers, through performance appraisals (both their own and their young workers'), through assessment events for technical skills, and through situations where conflicts needed to be resolved.

What did the novice workers do themselves to develop their employability skills?

At each of the sites, novice workers were asked what approaches they used themselves to develop their employability skills. These can be categorised under nine of the 12 steps proposed by Holton and Naquin (2001a) for novice workers, as in table 10.

Clearly a range of approaches were deployed by novice workers. The combination of approaches was no doubt influenced by the type and nature of work, the workplace culture, the relationships between and amongst staff, as well as the nature of the individual novice worker. For example, some were naturally shyer than others and so were more likely to watch others than ask questions. Approaches also needed to vary over time. For example at Kaylene Krantz (Portside Group Training Company) the trainee noted that, in the beginning, he had followed set procedures and performed tasks as others did them. As he became more experienced he was able to suggest new ways of doing things and these suggestions were accepted. It would be expected that this movement from 'following' to 'leading' would take much longer in different situations and in some cases, no variation from set procedures would be tolerated.

Table 10: Approaches used by novice workers to develop their employability skills

Step	Approaches used by novice workers in the study
Adopt the right attitudes	✧ Asking for more work or extra shifts
	✧ Arriving early
	✧ Planning social life around work not vice versa
Adjust your expectations	✧ Accepting that there was not one way to do things
Master breaking-in skills	✧ Talking to everybody
	✧ Smiling
Manage the impressions you make	✧ Showing willingness and enthusiasm
	✧ Doing extra work
	✧ Demonstrate reliability
Build effective relationships	✧ Working at being part of the 'social chit chat' through active teamwork and social activities organised around or through work.
	✧ Seeking out the most helpful co-workers as mentors
Become a good follower	✧ Seeking advice
	✧ Managing relationships with managers
	✧ Not being a 'know all'
	✧ Shadowing a manager
Develop work smarts	✧ Using strategies for dealing with pressure, e.g. deep breathing
	✧ Learning from mistakes of co-workers
Master the tasks of your job	✧ Asking for different work and more responsibility
	✧ Asking for feedback
	✧ Watching, asking questions, listen actively
Acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities you need	✧ Taking advantage of off-the-job training opportunities
	✧ Taking off-the-job training seriously
	✧ Using skills learned at school
	✧ Developing a system for organising tasks

What are other settings in which employability skills are developed?

Although the study did not specifically include any questions about other places in which employability skills were developed, some respondents offered opinions about this topic. In some instances more emphasis was placed on pre-employment development of employability skills, notably where employers placed a strong emphasis on well-developed employability skills as a basis for selection.

Employability skills development before starting work

Work experience undertaken through school

This was generally seen as very valuable. It developed general employability skills and attributes such as presentation and punctuality. Work experience was seen by employers as particularly valuable where it introduced students to the relevant industry area, suggesting that they saw employability skills to some extent as context-bound.

Job-seeking/careers/work education/VET courses at school

Some novice workers mentioned that such classes had assisted them prepare for work, although they could never fully prepare them for what the workplace was like. Portside Group Training Company mentioned that Indigenous young people sometimes undertook trade-related courses at school, which made them attractive to employers.

Previous casual/informal work including unpaid work such as on family farms

Several novice workers mentioned prior informal working experiences. These were commonly with family members, for example, helping out at a father's pharmacy and in a cousin's mail-order business. These served to introduce the young workers to workplaces in a relatively unthreatening manner.

Pre-vocational courses run by group training companies

At MEGT, courses in retail and office administration covered employability skills such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving, as well as job-seeking. However, the funding for these courses was in doubt at the time of the case study which was a matter of concern for MEGT as they were convinced of the value of these courses in their apprentices' and trainees' development of employability skills and hence their ability to find and retain employment.

Pre-apprenticeship courses

MEGT did not take apprentices for carpentry and joinery unless they had done a pre-apprenticeship; this was an employer request. Building trade employers wanted young people to have basic trade skills.

Sport and other extra curricular activities

Sport and extra activities at school such as organising social events were valued by employers. These activities were important in selection because they implied that young people were likely to have some employability skills. They provided evidence of planning and organising.

Undergoing Year 12 at school

Advanced studies at school were seen to aid skills in learning to learn, planning and organising, managing stress, communicating, and finding out information.

It should be noted that while these are listed as occurring before starting work, many school children were working while at school and were thus undertaking the above activities at the same time as working.

Employability skill development undertaken concurrently with work

Concurrent training at a registered training organisation (RTO) or other organisation

Off-the-job training at a registered training organisation such as an institute of TAFE was seen as important, by some employers, for young workers. It developed employability skills as well as technical skills, and generally helped the young people mature. One of the young workers was training in the Army Reserve and he found this beneficial in his work.

Role of parents

The role of parents was particularly interesting as this is rarely recorded in literature on young workers, beyond the fact that apprentices and trainees under the age of 18 must have their parents sign their training contracts. Some employers such as Courier Newspapers and Hamburger House made great efforts to involve parents, presumably because of the very young age of their workers. Group training companies also sought the assistance of parents. Parents were variously reported as:

- communicating with supervisors in relation both to routine and to difficult issues
- attending 'disciplinary' type meetings
- helping young people plan work and meet deadlines

- working alongside the young people (in the case of newspaper delivery)
- driving them to work—a very important role especially where the job involved early starts or split shifts; this became less important as the teenagers became old enough to possess their own vehicles
- motivating the young people and boosting their self-esteem.

The greatest involvement of parents was at Courier Newspapers. Very often parents had to do most of the work involved in the newspaper round at first, withdrawing their assistance when the young person was able to take more responsibility. These were the very youngest novice workers, as young as ten years of age in some cases.

Role of group training companies

Group training companies appeared to perform an invaluable function in helping young people obtain and retain work. They were able to work with novice workers to develop their employability skills both before they got their first jobs and while they were employed. Employers were relieved of the 'yucky stuff' associated with counselling, disciplining and dismissing workers, and were able to 'hand them back' when things became too difficult. Group training companies had a role in finding replacement host employers where attachments had not worked out, and even in some cases employing the trainees at their own offices. Regular visits from field workers ensured that difficulties were addressed and the young people were motivated through difficult times. Monitoring by field workers also ensured that training was being carried out satisfactorily. Group training companies were able to pay particular attention to disadvantaged young people: Portside Group Training Company employed 35 Indigenous trainees and apprentices at the time of the case study and was skilled in dealing with this particular equity group and maintained networks with other organisations working with other such young people.

It should be emphasised again that the topic of pre-employment and outside-workplace development of employability skills was not systematically examined, as the focus of the study was only on what happened in workplaces, and only those opinions which were offered were recorded. More information could undoubtedly be gathered in a study which specifically asked questions relating to non-work sites.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

This section discusses ideas raised by the participants about how employability skills could be better developed. As in the previous section, the potential role of other people or bodies outside the workplace was not explored systematically, but where suggestions were made, they were noted and are reported here. The question of how such skills could be better developed within the workplace was, however, explored in depth in the case studies, and this site of skills development is discussed first.

In workplaces

Many of the suggestions which were made by managers, young workers, and other staff were tempered by comments that they understood that time and resources would prevent their full implementation. Moreover, it was recognised that some workplaces were more difficult for novice workers than others.

Workplaces which offered particular challenges included those where:

- There was a well-established workgroup which was hard to break into.
- The pace of work was very fast (for example, restaurant kitchens).

- The novice worker was on show and felt nervous about making mistakes.
- Other workers were not welcoming, were suspicious of newcomers or were not happy in their work.
- Employers only employed novice workers because they were cheap.

Introduce novice workers progressively to real tasks and to the whole workplace

Rostering new workers on at quiet times would help them gain confidence in their tasks before they were subject to the real demands of the workplace. Also, there was a need to scaffold their learning so that they could see how what they were currently learning related both to their total learning experience and to the operations of the business. Opinions varied as to whether the new workers should begin with an overview of the business before learning their specific tasks, or whether they should begin with their own tasks and 'move outwards'. Shadowing a manager or visiting suppliers could be good ways of getting the 'big picture'.

Devote more time and resources to formal training

Several respondents thought that spending more time in initial training away from the work station would be of benefit to young people. Such training could address employability skills directly, with training, for example, in communication. Time devoted to technical skills training would also help, ensuring that young people were less flustered when starting their jobs and thus more able to pay attention to the non-technical aspects of working. While induction processes were helpful, it was mentioned by two respondents that novice workers were so nervous that they often assimilated very little information. There was an argument for at least part of the process taking place a little while after commencement.

Develop individual learning plans for novice workers

Individual plans for each new worker could include technical and employability skills and could link to off-the-job training. Such plans should extend to the medium-term (for example, a minimum of six months) rather than focussing purely on initial training.

Provide more one-to-one dialogue with supervisors

It was suggested that senior managers should make time in their schedules to speak to novice workers even if only briefly, as such attention gave them confidence. Hamburger House, for example, ensured that the restaurant manager personally worked alongside the novice worker for the first few shifts.

Set a good example

Employers needed to 'get rid of [their] own bad habits' and make sure they were modelling good behaviour to the novice workers.

Provide support in the workplace

Workplaces should ensure that someone is always on hand to answer questions and to supervise the young person in his or her work. Mistakes needed to be treated as opportunities for learning rather than occasions for discipline.

Pay careful attention to individual interactions

Because novice workers generally lacked confidence, it sometimes took very little to discourage them. Thus one co-worker said that the tone in which feedback was given was very important: 'some of us use grumpier voices than others'. Staff working with novice workers should be

encouraged to be patient and to persevere even when initial attempts to assist were not successful. Novice workers need to be taught how to receive criticism.

Provide more opportunities to develop team work

Specific training in team working was suggested by one manager at Bakers Delight. It was recognised in several workplaces that it was the attitude and actions of other workers as much as those of management which could prevent novice workers from settling in and beginning to develop their employability skills. More time for team meetings would also be of use.

Train supervisors to manage novice workers more effectively

Poor supervisory practices were a common barrier to the development of employability skills. Where first-line managers were not well trained, young workers could easily become discouraged. Young workers did not react well to being shouted at and needed to be nurtured. Hamburger House noted that it sometimes took up to three years for first-line managers to become adept at handling novice workers and clearly there was potential for harm here. The training systems for managers were currently being revised to improve this situation. The following comment from a 15-year-old worker illustrated the way in which novice workers would like to be treated: '[if I had my own business, I would] make them feel welcome and safe, and happy to come to work'.

Consider motivation strategies

One manager suggested incentives such as prizes which could be made available only to novice workers. This was in the context of a workplace which routinely offered such incentives for performance. More generally it was suggested that managers could be trained to motivate their staff better. Setting and monitoring achievement of realistic goals would be one useful strategy.

Stick to the bargain

Novice workers generally expected to receive appropriate training and to be treated fairly. Where such expectations were not met, they became disillusioned and their skills development could easily stall. Problems needed to be addressed swiftly. Similarly, the young workers needed to be very clear about what was expected of them. Clear standards needed to be set for behaviour and for levels of task performance. Novice workers appeared to set some store by this 'psychological contract' (Schuler 1995, p.G-14).

Suggestions for strategies to be adopted by novice workers included:

- Talk to all staff.
- Don't be shy.
- Ask questions.
- Keep a notebook to jot down ideas.
- Ask for extra work when tasks are finished.
- Ask to learn new skills.
- Accept criticism as constructive.
- Look at the way different people work and compare them.
- Adapt conversation to the workgroup.
- Show commitment.
- Don't expect to fit in instantly.
- Be careful to create the right initial impression.

As well as developing their employability skills per se, following these suggestions would help novice workers become trusted and valued, and hence would encourage other staff to invest in training them.

In other settings

Some suggestions were offered by some respondents about how other institutions could assist in developing employability skills. Respondents were not specifically questioned in this area, so the responses are not necessarily representative of what other respondents might have said if asked. A small minority of managers were quite insistent about the desirability of others taking more responsibility in this area. Most respondents were more measured in their suggestions. Suggestions were as follows:

Schools could:

- Hold career days.
- Train students in interview skills.
- Prepare students for what the workplace is like.
- Explain to students so that learning can take place outside the classroom.
- Provide longer periods of work experience.
- Train students in how to deal with and respect other people.
- Train students in communication and presentation skills.
- Use work experience explicitly to identify and develop employability skills.
- Provide preparation for work before students get jobs (as many get jobs before they do work experience).
- Organise visits to workplaces.

Parents could:

- Develop self-esteem.
- Get young people involved in family members' workplaces.
- Teach manners and courtesy.
- Teach basic skills like cleaning and sweeping floors.
- Be supportive.

The registered training organisation which the novice worker attends on day or block release could:

- Pay explicit attention to employability skills.
- Provide more practical training.
- Provide awareness training for supervisors of apprentices/trainees.

Comparability of employability skills required in part-time and full-time jobs

It was generally accepted that prior part-time working experience was of assistance to school leavers when seeking full-time jobs. The high value which nearly all of the employers of school leavers placed upon previous working experience suggested that they expected at least some employability skills to have been developed in part-time work. No clear evidence emerged, however, as to whether the employability skills required for, and developed by, students working part time were different from those in full-time jobs. Some respondents believed that part-time

jobs developed only basic skills, such as personal presentation, punctuality, communication, and appropriate work behaviour, while full-time work required a wider range of skills. However, such opinions appeared to derive mainly from the differing industry areas in which these respondents had worked in their part-time and full-time jobs respectively. For example the (business) trainee at Kaylene Krantz (Portside Group Training Company) felt that his (retail) part-time work had not developed his employability skills significantly, whereas the (hospitality) trainee at Bayview (MEGT Group Training Company) transferred many employability skills from his previous (fast food) part-time work.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed a wide range of activities taking place and exemplified in the case studies to help develop the employability skills of novice workers. There were many reasons why employers were recruiting novice workers and, having recruited them, they were undertaking a series of activities aimed, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, at developing their employability skills. While able to identify drawbacks to employment of novice workers, they nevertheless continued to recruit them.

Different enterprises attached different value to the various employability skills and attributes required in the jobs to which they recruited novice workers. Teamwork and communication were the most commonly valued skills, and reliability, a sense of humour and enthusiasm were the most commonly valued attributes. Some of these skills were regarded as central in some jobs; for example, at Hamburger House they were more like technical than employability skills. Some employers were more rigorous than others in their selection processes, requiring high levels of employability skills before accepting novice workers into their companies.

A range of processes was utilised as a medium for employability skills development. Some of these processes were set up as formal company systems; for example, buddying, induction and performance appraisals. Others were embedded in work practices; for example, task rotation, managing mistakes and the allocation of increasing responsibility. Perhaps as important as these processes, were the informal one-to-one interactions which took place between existing workers and the novice workers. All existing workers, from managers to co-workers, who were also teenagers, had an effect on the novice workers, and the way in which they treated the novice workers affected the development of employability skills. Staff learned how to work with novice workers effectively in a variety of ways, sometimes through formal company programs and sometimes through remembering their own experiences as novice workers. Staff offered a range of suggestions about how employability skills could be better developed within their own or other organisations.

Novice workers were not passive in this process. Many of the novice workers described what they had done to improve their employability skills, or made suggestions which other novice workers could follow. The key appeared to be to communicate proactively with everybody in the workplace. In addition, it seemed to be important to manage the impression that they made on others. Novice workers also had opportunities to develop their employability skills elsewhere, either through experiences they had had before starting work, or in concurrent experiences such as attending a registered training organisation, interactions with a group training company field worker, or by using the support of their parents.

Analysis and implications

This chapter analyses the findings reported in the previous chapter and draws out some implications. The discussion is organised around five major areas:

- employers' motivations in hiring novice workers
- good models, from the case studies, of employability skills development of novice workers
- advantages to employers of better employability skills development of novice workers
- other processes which could facilitate the development of employability skills of novice workers
- the uniqueness of workplaces as sites for developing employability skills of novice workers.

The chapter focusses upon processes within, or closely connected to, workplaces. The findings which relate to other possible sites for employability skills development were reported in the previous chapter but are not further discussed in this final chapter as they were not the focus of the study.

The research found that the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry list of employability skills and attributes was a useful tool in describing what the different stakeholders saw as necessary attributes and skills to function effectively in a workplace and in working life. While some attributes and skills in the framework were not mentioned as significant by some workplaces, respondents were only asked to comment on the most important in the jobs for which they recruited novice workers, and hence no conclusions could be drawn about the efficacy of the framework. The few suggested additions to the list noted in the previous chapter had no major implications for the framework. There did not seem to be an agreed difference between attributes and skills; some participants said that attributes were innate and could not be developed, whereas others had very explicit strategies for developing attributes.

Employers' motivations in hiring novice workers

As discussed earlier, employers had a number of reasons for hiring novice workers. These can be divided into operational reasons, those related to the attributes of young people, and non-business reasons. Table 11 displays the reasons given for hiring novice workers classified into these three categories. It also displays additional comments employers made about the positive attributes of novice workers which were not mentioned in relation to hiring decisions.

These reasons are partly in line with the literature, for example Cregan's (1997a) summary of reasons for hiring young workers. Cregan did not, however, mention the following factors found in the current study:

- part played by low-skill novice workers in enterprise skill mix
- availability for non-standard working hours
- opportunity for development of existing staff
- fresh views and ideas

- physical fitness
- organisational image
- community obligations
- maintain industry skills base.

Table 11: Reasons for hiring novice workers and their positive attributes

Type of reason	Reason for employing novice workers	Additional positive attributes
Operational	Low cost	Willingness to learn
	Technology skills and up-to-date knowledge	Inquisitiveness
	Enterprise skill mix (only basic skills needed)	Creativity
	Availability for the hours required	Career oriented
	Opportunity for development of existing staff through supervision of novice workers	Grateful/wanting to impress
		Keen/hardworking
Young people's attributes	Youthful exuberance	Able to manage stress
	Mouldability	Not disillusioned by previous working experiences
	Fresh views and ideas	
	Physical fitness	
	Organisational image	
	Lack bad habits	
Non-business reasons	Tradition	
	Community obligations	
	Maintain industry skills base	

The current study appears, therefore, to extend the British research. The British research, summarised by Cregan (1997a), does not appear to attribute any non-business motives to employers of novice workers, nor does it seem to pay attention to student-working as the major entrée to the workforce which it has now become. The British research also appears to view novice workers in a less positive light, almost as passive units of production, whereas the current project's findings of employer preference for physical fitness, fresh views and ideas, and the part young people play in an organisation's image, presents a more positive and active view of novice workers. The study does not support a deficit view of novice workers but neither does it suggest there are no problems associated with hiring young people who have not worked before.

The study showed some disparity between the reason for hiring novice workers and what employers say they value in the novice workers they have employed. For example, physical fitness and the availability for shifts were not mentioned as positive attributes. It could simply be that these features were taken for granted in novice workers once they were hired.

The preceding chapter lists the negative attributes of novice workers which were uncovered in the case studies. Although managers, supervisors and co-workers were able to list a number of negative attributes, these were generally described as only to be expected among teenagers, and did not appear to deter enterprises from continuing to hire novice workers. Moreover, employers were clear that these negative attributes were not applicable to all novice workers (to a lesser extent, this was also stated in relation to positive attributes).

The major negative attributes appeared to be the following:

- difficulty in adjusting to full-time work from a school environment—length of working day, lack of structure, need to take initiative
- for younger student workers, difficulty in viewing work as a serious activity rather than a setting for social interactions
- the impingement of personal matters upon work—transport problems, relationship difficulties, occasionally drug or alcohol difficulties

- poor communication skills (basically, shyness)
- lack of basic work skills, like the need to keep working environment clean
- lack of a 'big picture' understanding of the operation of a business
- unwillingness to ask questions if unsure
- lack of understanding of the impression they are making on other workers.

These are the major areas which require development by the employer, by a third party, or by the novice workers themselves.

It was very plain from the studies that some employers enjoyed the challenge of working with young people to improve their skills. Two comments which illustrate the satisfaction gained in this role were as follows:

> I like to take them on because I will be a major influence on them throughout their life. They will reflect back on it one day and say 'Gee, I learned a lot from George'.
>
> (Hamburger House restaurant manager)

> With any luck what we teach him now is going to stay with him. (Sound Fits manager)

Good models of employability skills development of novice workers

This section presents the most effective models of employability skills development displayed in the 12 case studies.

Comprehensive training systems

Established training systems support the development of employability skills in a number of ways, even where training is not delivered explicitly in employability skills. The existence of identifiable training programs and training pathways for novice workers, either delivered in the workplace or off the job, provide them with the opportunity to develop both technical and employability skills in a structured way. Training systems also include induction arrangements which are valuable tools for articulating the attitudes and behaviours expected of novice workers. Active training systems encourage novice workers, generate commitment to the organisation and prioritise skills development. They should be consistent in policy and practice at all levels of an organisation. Such systems should be provided for all novice workers. At Superfoods for example, less training was available for casual workers compared with permanent staff. While this is not surprising and a common finding with relation to training provision in enterprises, it raises special difficulties where novice workers are concerned, as they typically enter such organisations as casuals, and due to their special needs require more, rather than less, training.

Training systems can also support the development of employability skills in novice workers by providing programs for supervisory staff to ensure that they have the skills to assist the development of employability skills amongst novice workers for whom they are responsible. This was the case at Hamburger House.

While structured training systems are important, equally important is a sense that training is valued, or what is sometimes called a 'training culture'. In an organisation that values staff learning, novice workers are encouraged to consider their own skills development and are more likely to participate in training and learning activities that will develop both their technical and employability skills. An established training culture also supports off-the-job training requirements of apprentices and trainees, providing them with the opportunity to reflect on their learning and practices, and to put the practices of their own workplaces in context and learn about other ways of doing things.

Regular team meetings

Regular staff or team meetings are a valuable mechanism to improve the quality of goods and services produced in a workplace. They are also a valuable forum to focus specifically on the behaviours and attitudes expected in the workplace. They create opportunities to develop teamwork and focus on operational issues involving the deployment of employability skills. If time is permitted, they can be used (as at Fiona's Hair Salon) specifically to run informal simulations and scenarios to highlight correct procedures or techniques related to real or hypothetical work challenges. In this way, work-related issues and problems can be discussed in an open way, and where time permits, specific tools can be used to develop employability skills and procedural skills amongst all staff. Inviting novice workers to such meetings is a way of making them feel valued and part of the team. At Hamburger House, one manager always invited novice workers to a management meeting to give them an insight into the operations of the restaurant.

Performance management approach

Performance management systems provide opportunities to state the behaviours which are valued within an organisation. Thus they can be used to foreground the development of employability skills within an organisation. Formal staff appraisal systems can involve both novice workers and supervisors in such as way as to make explicit the need to develop employability skills. The use of self-assessments within these systems can encourage novice workers to consider the deployment and development of their skills, and can contribute to building a learning culture within a workplace. This was the case at Supernova Electrical.

Key performance indicators for supervisors and managers can relate to developing employability skills amongst novice workers, providing support to novice workers or ensuring the smooth transition of novice workers. Hamburger House was one example where this was done.

Comprehensive performance management systems may also include procedures for mistake management and conflict resolution within an organisation. These processes also provide opportunities to foreground employability skills and ensure that novice workers understand their responsibilities at work and the standards of performance required in a workplace, while ensuring that errors and conflicts can be used as learning opportunities not merely disciplinary occasions.

Third-party model

A third-party model is seen in a number of different case studies. Third parties included:

- group training company field workers (for example, MEGT)
- parents (for example, Courier Newspapers, Hamburger House)
- teachers and other staff from registered training organisations.

These measures were found to be relevant to the development of employability skills in two main ways. Firstly, the third parties act as intermediaries or circuit breakers, who can become involved in strategies for addressing the inappropriate deployment of employability skills and attitudes. This role includes them in any conflict resolution procedures that may exist in a workplace, and provides an external reference point for novice workers.

Secondly, third parties can further encourage the development of employability skills and provide support to novice workers who may be experiencing difficulty with the transition from school to work. This support can often include pastoral care, such as helping to find appropriate accommodation, or transport to work; or assistance with relationship or drug problems. It was interesting to note that, in some case studies, the employer was happy to get involved in such issues. This was the case, for example, at Sound Fits and Frankston Hospital (MEGT Group Training Company).

Buddying/mentor systems

For novice workers to become productive and settled in a workplace, they require some instruction in the procedures and tasks related to their role, along with guidance and support on the behaviours and attitudes required in the workplace.

This instruction and guidance is often best provided by 'buddies' or 'mentors' through either formal or informal systems. These advisers may be variously co-workers or supervisors and team leaders, depending on the organisation of work in the enterprise and the skills of available personnel. The use of the buddy system relies on the skills and attitudes of the 'buddy' who becomes responsible for integrating the novice worker and ensuring they display appropriate work habits and behaviours. Various approaches can be used by 'buddies', with most supporting the development of both employability skills and technical skills amongst novice workers. The most effective way to develop the employability skills of novice workers appears to involve teaming novice workers with experienced staff members who have excellent work habits and who can model the job effectively. Clearly, staff selected as 'buddies' should have the ability to develop a rapport with novice workers and be able to relate well to young people. Some employers placed a great deal of emphasis on selecting the appropriate staff for this role.

Supportive environment

The findings from the case studies indicate that novice workers require a supportive environment if they are to deploy and develop their employability skills. Supervisors and co-workers who show tolerance and respect to novice workers are those who enable novice workers to develop their employability skills in a supportive and supported environment. Novice workers feel that they became more confident and are encouraged to deploy their employability skills when they understand that the workplace values them and their development as young people. Appropriate approaches to mistake management also contribute to the development of this environment, as do fair work systems that do not always reserve the most menial and disliked tasks solely for novice workers. By setting clear targets and limits, supervisors create space within which novice workers can act. With encouragement and motivation, supervisors and co-workers show novice workers respect by treating them as co-workers rather than 'slaves'.

Advantages to employers of better employability skills development of novice workers

In the introduction to the report it was noted that improved development of employability skills was likely to:

- assist employers to gain maximum commitment and productivity from young workers
- reduce turnover among young people in the early months of work, thereby reducing employer recruitment costs
- reduce the likelihood of young people becoming disillusioned with workplaces and thereby becoming at risk of long-term unemployment
- improve young people's ability to adapt and settle in to subsequent jobs
- build a better foundation for lifelong learning through work.

While these outcomes are partly related to the challenge of school-to-work transition for young people, they also recognise the benefits to employers and industry more broadly through improved productivity and return on investment.

The case studies showed that employers understood the benefits to themselves of developing employability skills in their novice workers. The benefits to employers can be summarised as follows:

- improved bottom line through higher productivity and fewer mistakes
- fewer disputes
- lower labour turnover
- reduced absenteeism
- a more pleasant working environment for everyone in the workplace
- good reputation, leading to attraction of further, good-quality, novice workers
- the possibility of retaining the better novice workers for medium-term careers and even long-term careers in management
- satisfaction afforded to managers, supervisors and co-workers through seeing a novice worker become confident and happy in a workplace.

It could be argued that if novice workers were to come 'ready-made' with employability skills, some of these outcomes would still be achieved. However, it is actually the transformation from raw recruit to confident worker which creates the satisfaction referred to in the final point. Such a process involves, of course, the development of technical as well as employability skills. Moreover, the process of good employability skills development creates loyalty in the novice workers, leading to retention and to the good reputation which attracts further cohorts of novice workers. These issues are important to those employers who need to recruit large numbers of novice workers for the operational reasons referred to earlier in this chapter.

Other processes which could facilitate the development of employability skills of novice workers

As discussed above, a number of models of good practice were identified during the research and analysis process. Comparison of the different case studies and reflection by the researchers and reference groups led to the following suggestions about additional means for developing employability skills in workplaces. The suggestions are related to processes which employers might wish to implement and to training which might be implemented for supervisors, co-workers and novice workers themselves.

There is currently little recognition of the role of employers in developing employability skills in novice workers. There may or may not be a willingness of employers to assume the role, but for those who do so, the consequences are likely to be beneficial for novice worker and employer alike.

Three additional suggestions for employers to consider implementing (apart from practices already listed in this report) are described below.

A 'work experience' model

Most employers understand the notion of work experience and are often provided with materials by the school when hosting students. The materials often assist employers in giving some sort of structure to the young person's time in the workplace and in understanding what the young person needs to learn.

Recognition of the initial job as akin to work experience might help provide an easing-in of the young person to the workplace and would enable explicit recognition of the challenges of the transition to being a worker.

Materials could include a leaflet for employers which would, for example, provide suggestions on good methods of easing the young person into working life, such as having him/her shadow other workers, buddying, arranging for appropriate and frequent feedback to be given, establishing expectations on both sides, encouraging him/her to ask questions, involving parents and other third parties (see the section 'How could the development of employability skills be improved?' in the previous chapter). A leaflet such as this needs to include encouragement to employers to find the time for these processes, and to underline the benefits of adopting them. The case studies indicated that lack of time was almost always a difficulty for employers.

Three points complicate this suggestion. Firstly, work experience is generally seen to have some deficiencies, particularly compared with structured work placements. The latter are generally seen, through a greater emphasis on the developments of skills, to be easier and more meaningful for both employer and student to handle (Smith & Green 2001). However, it is precisely the non-skills element of work experience which we advocate transferring to the starting-work experience. Secondly, there is a difference between work experience and work, which derives from the simple fact that work experience students are not employed, and it is not clear how wide this difference is or how much it might affect an attempt to transfer work-experience preparation for employers to starting-work preparation.[4] Thirdly, Reference Group A indicated that there is mounting evidence that insurance considerations are affecting the viability of work-experience programs. This could have an impact on starting-work materials which were based on a work-experience model.

Individual induction programs

One suggestion which could be made to employers is that they plan induction programs for their new staff. These would extend beyond initial induction courses which typically do not go beyond the first week of work. A template could be utilised which would sometimes need adaptation for each novice worker. The degree of adaptation would depend on the employability skills profile of each new person. For example, a less confident young person might need especial attention to buddying or to communication skills development.

The program needs to take a medium-term framework, for example, for six months after engagement, and include a range of experiences for the young person and identified times for formal feedback to be given.

Project learning

The research identified that 'feeling valued' and 'getting a big picture' were important features in facilitating the development of employability skills to be developed, and also that employers generally (although not always) feel the need to gain immediate bottom-line results from employing staff. Project learning is an approach that enables organisations to address real work problems by using tools and techniques that solve problems while developing a range of skills valued in contemporary workplaces, such as the employability skills discussed in this project. Project learning generally incorporates:

- designing a product
- planning and organising an event
- fixing or improving a production, service or delivery system that is producing outcomes or products that are of poor quality. (Winchester & Comyn 1997)

Providing project learning opportunities for novice workers in a planned way is an opportunity to address broader organisational challenges related to the production of quality goods and services while also giving novice workers authentic work which extends beyond basic tasks.

[4] For example, while employers might be asked to 'make allowances' for work experience students, some might not feel able to make allowances for workers whom they are paying.

Training for supervisors and co-workers

Supervisors and co-workers alike have important roles to play in helping novice workers develop employability skills. The best intentions by senior managers and human resource departments can be subverted when more junior staff do not understand their roles or are unwilling to assist. Explicit training in the development of employability skills would underline the importance of this process.

Supervisors

Single-page tools containing information about the nature of novice workers and checklists for supervisor behaviour could be useful. In well-resourced workplaces this would be additional to supervisor training.

Buddies

While buddying is widely utilised, it was not clear how much training buddies received. Managers appeared to select buddies because they were confident they could do the job, but extra training would undoubtedly be beneficial, and might also enable a wider pool of available buddies to be developed. An adapted single-page tool would be useful for buddies.

Other co-workers

As the Hamburger House National Training Manager commented: 'It can be a very icy first few weeks of employment before someone warms up to bring the person in'. Training for co-workers in accommodating and developing novice workers appears to be needed, especially in all-teenage workplaces where cliques sometimes seem to prevent easy integration of new workers. The tendency of young people to form cliques in high school has been noted for several decades in the international literature (for example, Eckert 1989) and the study gave some indication that similar groupings took place in all-teenage workplaces. Co-workers who have not been in a workplace for very long appear to lack tolerance for those about to make the same transition. However, well-established workgroups can also, if unwittingly, be excluding.

What do people need to know?

In dealing with novice workers, supervisors, buddies and co-workers need to know certain things. These understandings need to be shared with the novice workers, and include:

- an overview of the psychology of adolescence
- an appreciation of the 'early-days' problems of adjusting to work, such as being unaccustomed to long working days
- how it feels to be a first-time worker
- what is valued by novice workers
- how to provide a supportive environment (see the section 'what techniques do staff use in individual interactions with novice workers?' in the previous chapter).

Training for novice workers

As suggested above, employers can set in train a range of structured activities to assist novice workers and to ensure that other staff are effective in dealing with these young workers. Novice workers themselves need training and information which specifically addresses the development of employability skills. For this to happen, employers need to make the novice workers aware of the

skills they are attempting to develop. This development will often happen in conjunction with skills development, but if it is too artfully embedded, the novice workers may miss it.

In particular, novice workers need to be told what they can do to develop their employability skills by themselves. Some processes were discussed in the previous chapter ('what did the novice workers do themselves to develop their employability skills?').

The uniqueness of workplaces as sites for developing employability skills of novice workers

Although employers might expect young people to have developed some basic attributes and skills before they commence their working lives, there are several reasons why employability skills need to be developed in workplaces.

Some attributes and skills might be present (and different employers seek different levels) on recruitment; however, every employee can and should develop his or her employability skills throughout his or her working life. Thus employers need to view the process of employability skills development as a whole-of-workforce issue, although special attention needs to be paid to novice workers.

Secondly, every young worker comes to the workforce with different levels of employability skills. While some employers might blame schools or families for failing to bring young people up to the standard they might like, the fact remains that some young people might be quite deficient in such skills, sometimes through no fault of their own, and might need considerable assistance which the employer will have to provide if he or she decides to recruit such a young person. The younger the age group from which the employer recruits, the more likely are the novice workers to need such development. This fact is well-recognised by those employers which routinely recruit younger teenagers. In addition, the tighter the labour market, the more likely employers are to need to have the processes in place to develop employability skills.

Thirdly, employability skills are heavily context-bound. The preceding chapter noted that employers found it difficult to separate employability skills development from technical skills development. On the other hand, they had no difficulty in articulating which employability skills and attributes were important in their workplaces. Not all skills were developed in all workplaces, and not all were valued to same extent; even something as simple as punctuality was not always highly regarded. Thus any pre-employment program which focussed on employability skills might not develop the particular mix or weighting of skills and attributes required in particular workplaces. If employability skills are regarded (at least to some extent) as firm-specific, then economic theory demonstrates that the responsibility for financing such training rests at least partly with the employer (Becker 1964).

Fourthly, it is only in workplaces that young people fully appreciate the importance of the skills and the consequences of inadequate employability skills.

Finally, there appeared to be no consensus that employers particularly desired novice workers to be any different from the way they were when they joined the organisation. They appeared to accept the negatives along with the positives, and in most cases actively enjoyed the way in which they could contribute to employability skills development.

A role for schools

Although there was an acceptance that employability skills development was appropriately taking place in workplaces, some implications for schools did arise which realistically (and acknowledging

the already full school curriculum) might be addressed, perhaps during careers lessons. These include:

- information about alternative pathways to university and to various career objectives, which could incorporate part-time student-working or working full time before rather than after attending university. This might encourage young people who were working to value their working experiences more and utilise the learning potential of their jobs
- information on public transport (in locations where public transport exists) to assist young people in becoming self-reliant in relation to getting to work
- exposure to situations where young people interact with adults on adult terms such as voluntary work.

A leaflet to be distributed through schools to those about to start part-time jobs or leave school for full-time work would be a starting point for developing employability skills through work. This leaflet should also be made available to employers so that they could be aware of the advice young people were being given. Such a leaflet could include preparation which young people could undertake before starting work, an understanding of expectations of employers (such as the need to adopt an ethical approach to business practices), and, using the findings of this project, an introduction to processes which could be undertaken once in a job in order to improve employability skills.

Further research

This was an exploratory project and there is an argument for a larger, quantitative, study of employers relating to employability skills development of novice workers. The processes uncovered during the research could be tested on a larger sample of employers, and employers (and workers) could be asked for their opinions about the additional processes suggested. In addition, some further areas suggest themselves as being fruitful areas for research:

- the role of work experience in developing employability as distinct from technical skills
- action research into some of the interventions suggested in this report
- research into the best way to disseminate findings of studies such as these to young people and to employers
- further testing of the employability skills framework, with a wider group of stakeholders.

Conclusion

This chapter has summarised the important conclusions which can be drawn from the 12 case studies. It is recommended that the case studies themselves are read in full, as each case has elements which illustrate the importance of context to the employability skills which are valued and developed in particular circumstances. Each case study is representative of a particular industry area, size of enterprise and so on, but ultimately every enterprise is individual and the processes of employability skills development need to be unique to an enterprise.

The case studies clearly showed that most employers were paying some attention to developing the employability skills of their novice workers. There was some variation between the employers, and this depended partly on the importance which young workers played in their workforce structures. Employers generally accepted the 'down' side as well as the 'up' side of employing first-time workers, and made allowances for the negative attributes of young workers which they generally put down to youth and inexperience.

Suggestions were made by all levels of staff in the case studies as to how employability skills could be developed, and some excellent models have been discussed in the chapter. Most of the

suggestions could be implemented without the expenditure of large amounts of resources or time. The 'third-party' model alone requires assistance from an outside organisation. In the case of those young people not employed by a group training company and not attending a registered training organisation for training, there is an argument for a designated organisation or worker to act as a support service for novice workers. There is also a place for a standard information leaflet for employers and one for novice workers which could be distributed on a national basis.

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Appendix A—Case studies

Some of the case study companies are referred to by their real names, with permission. Other companies preferred the use of pseudonyms. The latter are: Superfoods, Autolights Manufacturing, Courier Newspapers, Portside Group Training, Market-town Council, Hamburger House, Supernova Electrical.

Autolights Manufacturing

Sue Erickson

Introduction

Autolights Manufacturing, located in Adelaide, at Lonsdale, a southern suburb, was founded in 1944 as a metal-forming business and progressed to manufacturing rear-vision mirrors for passenger cars and trucks. Autolights Manufacturing was part of a world organisation, Autolights International, whose head office was located in Germany. While 80% of the automotive goods produced in Adelaide were exported, Australian car manufacturers such as Ford, Mitsubishi and Holden were also supplied with their products.

Autolights Manufacturing maintained 712 employees at its Lonsdale plant. Approximately half of these were factory-production workers. Only a small number of them, approximately 100 workers, were young novice workers. Approximately equal numbers of male and female staff worked at the Lonsdale factory production site, with seven apprentices working in toolmaking, electrical, mechanical, new products tooling and plant services. The factory working hours were 6 am until 2 pm.

The production workers were supplied by agencies which recruited, interviewed and assessed prospective employees. To help combat the high drop-out rate of factory workers, labour-hire companies supplying factory employees applied a manual dexterity test (designed by the company's training co-ordinator) to demonstrate their capacity to follow a demonstration, to read written step-by-step instructions, to use common sense and to assemble parts—the same parts which would be used in the factory. In this way the applicant would be informed about the type of work they would be undertaking in the factory, while the test identified those who possessed the necessary dexterity skills for undertaking assembly work. The drop-out rate of new workers had decreased since the introduction of this test.

Staff were initially taken on as contractors and were still employed by the agencies until they were made permanent. This practice gave Autolights Manufacturing the opportunity to observe the new recruit, and permanency was granted after approximately six months if they performed their duties as required, were reliable and displayed a good work ethic. This case study focussed on two of the factory production workers in the Motor Mechanic section.

There was a high worker turnover in the factory work, particularly with the younger workers. Once summer came some left to go surfing, others to undertake travel, while others returned to study. A number of the young employees used the factory work as an opportunity to make some money and did not view it as a long-term career. Autolights Manufacturing had established a corporate training program which offered a wide range of learning programs for their staff. That Autolights is a

company which is serious about establishing a solid and reliable workforce is evidenced by the stated company aim of making all contract staff permanent.

Research method

After initial contact with the organisational development manager, arrangements were made with the human resources officer for interviews with a number of staff who worked with the two young factory assembly workers—the subjects of this case study. Interviews with the following personnel were undertaken using a tape recorder. Interviews were subsequently transcribed and written up.

Staff member	Role, duties
Human resources officer	Human resource management; interviewed contract staff for permanency
Senior supervisor, Motor Mech Dept.	Undertook: ✧ shift scheduling ✧ dealing with people issues such as absenteeism ✧ production issues ✧ overseeing new workers in day shift
Training co-ordinator	Training, largely with non-technical training including: ✧ induction training ✧ personal development (presentation skills, time management, mentor training, negotiation skills ✧ lean manufacturing ✧ occupational health and safety ✧ innovation skills ✧ equal employment opportunity ✧ leadership courses (supervisor and manager development) ✧ dedicated teamwork training
Young worker (female)*	Assembly-line worker
Young worker (male)	Assembly-line worker

Note: * This employee, while not a novice worker, was nevertheless new to the company. The novice worker originally selected for interview was absent on the day of the scheduled interview.

Findings

Why does the organisation recruit novice workers and how does it view them?

The company did not actively recruit young people for its factory. Three labour-hire agencies recruited for Autolights, choosing staff who suited the company's requirements and hiring from any age group. The senior supervisor noted that, while recruits go through a screening process in the labour-hire agency, often employees were not entirely appropriate since the company had no input into the selection process.

The manager of one of the labour-hire companies commented that Autolights had higher entrance-level requirements than other production companies. Because of these, he believed that the ideal age for workers to start at Autolights was approximately 20 years old. Therefore, the agency looked for people who possessed qualities such as numerical and visual accuracy, who weren't colour-blind and who would present well at an interview. Passing the manual dexterity test and medical test were also requirements. Many young people do not qualify medically because of asthma and drug usage. Others did not pass the manual dexterity test.

Despite the fact that the company had no specific policy regarding recruitment of young people, the training co-ordinator suggested that employing young people brought a 'fresh set of eyes' to the company's processes. Because they were unencumbered by previous knowledge of systems, they could suggest new and often more effective ways of accomplishing tasks. The Motor Mech Section

had just begun to bring in younger staff—more 16-year-olds. The supervisors and older staff thought it would be good to bring some youthful energy into the area while providing some young people with the opportunity to get a job.

In relation to how the company perceives its novice workers, the general view was that often the new younger workers came with an attitude that 'the world owed them a living'. As one of the interviewees noted:

Generally they need motivation because process work can be boring and repetitive and when the young ones come in from school it's a bit of a shock to them. They are used to chatting, having recess and lunch and not having to work in such a controlled manner. Some don't want to learn and have an attitude problem. They find it difficult to follow the rules. Some of the 17-year-olds are very immature and are easily distracted. It depends on their background.

Another interviewee commented on the often unrealistic aspirations of the young recruits coming to the job with keenness and enthusiasm:

Sometimes they were too enthusiastic, and had an expectation of being highly successful and often were a little unrealistic hoping to become millionaires within a few years. Their dreams were factory floor to CEO [chief executive officer], and these hopes slowly died six months later when they were still working in the factory.

Moreover, it was felt, and this comment was made by one of the co-worker interviewees, that assembly work can be boring and repetitive, and although employees are not obliged to talk in the workplace, a bright and positive attitude about their lives and their work, benefited both themselves and the workplace.

The human resources officer commented that young workers who had already participated in the workforce in some way—for example, undertaking part-time work in a supermarket or in a takeaway—have developed communication skills which were useful once employed by Autolights. Well-developed communication skills generally meant more confident and thus, better workers.

What processes are used in the company to develop employability skills in novice workers?

When recruits first joined the company they undertook induction conducted by their team leader, the supervisor or the senior supervisor. A checklist was used to indicate location of lockers and toilets, to explain company policy, timekeeping and general housekeeping matters. Within two hours of this initial induction recruits were working on the assembly line being instructed about their work on the job.

Within a week of beginning work they attended a three-hour induction program which covered company policies (use of telephones, smoking etc.) and offered a basic introduction to occupational health and safety, quality systems and equal opportunity policy. This more comprehensive induction program was conducted by the training co-ordinator.

The senior supervisor had adopted a deliberate policy of ensuring that young people worked in team groups of two or four and she attempted to place younger workers with those more experienced workers in order to 'stabilise' them. In this way, employability skills, in particular, motivation, enthusiasm, reliability and a sense of humour, are developed. Sometimes, however, this has not been possible since permanent workers are offered the choice of particular tasks before contract staff.

The senior supervisor also had a less formal training role, that of follow-up on problems the young people may be experiencing. Some of them were a mere 16 years old and were not living at home. Young workers received on-the-job training from other staff members who had completed an on-the-job instructor course and who had been assessed against the metal workers and engineering competencies.

Young workers were also able to take advantage of the extensive range of non-technical training programs offered by the company and conducted by the training co-ordinator.

These include:

- on-the-job trainer
- heath and safety
- first-aid
- training to team leader, supervisor and senior supervisor
- on-site job-specific courses.

The training co-ordinator also indicated that leadership programs could be undertaken through TAFE.

What do novice workers do themselves to develop their employability skills and how do they regard the development of these skills?

The two young workers interviewed had not been with the company long enough to take advantage of the staff and personal development/learning skills programs except for the initial induction course.

The 16-year-old felt he had developed a lot more in the three months that he had been with the company. This young worker commented that school had not prepared him for the workplace. He was more committed and more motivated since starting work. He had learned the importance of being reliable and had enjoyed receiving the small financial reward the company offered for 100% attendance. He believed that his communication skills had improved and he had learned to work as part of a team and had learned the value of a sense of humour, particularly when diffusing a situation that could become an issue. His planning and organising skills had improved as he learned to balance work and home life with his overtime commitments. All of the areas where this young worker felt he had gained are important components of employability skills.

The other worker by contrast, was less enthusiastic about skills she may have gained while working on the assembly line at Autolights. She felt that she had not developed additional skills; in fact, believed that she was using fewer of those she already possessed. While she enjoyed the initial induction training, she was unaware that further opportunities for training were available. In the context of the on-the-job training this young worker was offered, she commented that some trainers were more effective than others, spending more time explaining new and confusing areas in detail. Furthermore, she found that her training was assisted by working in a team of four. Because other team members were already familiar with the tasks to be undertaken, they gave her advice to help her 'get up to speed'.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

The human resources officer, the senior supervisor and the training co-ordinator all believed that a longer induction period, held over a number of days, would be advantageous.

The senior supervisor commented that young people often lacked company loyalty, motivation and commitment and believed that a longer induction process, which included training highlighting the 'Autolights values', may help with attitudes. Although the company did not have work experience students in the production area (they generally go into the engineering area), the senior supervisor felt that it may be a good idea to give school students an insight of the real nature of factory work—getting up at 5 am and doing repetitive work.

It was generally agreed desirable that, with increased time and money, factory-line workers should receive increased training in the technical skills area. It was believed that the provision of more one-on-one training would enhance the development of employability skills. Speaking to on-the-job trainers about the novice workers, the senior supervisor reminded them to: 'encourage them, pump them up, make them feel good about their work and give them extra care'. This appeared to be

effective advice, since when the novice workers were encouraged and given extra attention, they commented that they felt valued team members, enjoying their work more and developing better work habits because they were perceived to be valued team members.

Are there differences between the employability skills required by, and developed in, part-time student jobs and full-time jobs?

Company staff interviewed acknowledged that young recruits were better equipped for the workforce if they had already undertaken part-time work while at school; for example, working in a supermarket or takeaway necessarily taught young people communication skills—they had to interact with the customer—or reliability skills—they had to turn up for work or they would lose their jobs. One of the young novices himself acknowledged that school had not prepared him for the workplace.

As the company does not employ part-time novice workers it was not possible to determine whether different employability skills were required by full-time and part-time workers.

Conclusion

In relation to the development of employability skills in novice workers, the following features emerged at Autolights Manufacturing.

- The company actively trained people in employability skills, with all employees attending two induction programs.
- On-the-job trainers focussed on team work (combining less experienced workers with more skilled workers), technology skills and gave support on personal issues.
- The training co-ordinator offered programs in personal development and innovation skills.
- The development of the manual dexterity test applied by the labour-hire agencies has helped to eliminate the recruitment of unco-ordinated new workers while indicating to prospective employees an idea of the type of work that they would be undertaking.
- The corporate training program indicated to new workers the training/learning opportunities available and fostered a learning/training culture at all levels.

Bakers Delight

Sue Erickson

Introduction

Bakers Delight was established in 1980 as a single bakery in the Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn. It has since grown into a franchise organisation with over 500 bakeries throughout Australia and New Zealand. There are 52 bakeries in South Australia, six of which are company-owned.

This case study examined two Adelaide bakeries, one situated in the western suburb of Hilton and owned by Bakers Delight and the other situated at the beachside suburb of Glenelg and owned by a franchisee. The head office of Bakers Delight was not directly involved in the day-to-day recruiting for franchised businesses.

Glenelg Bakers Delight

The Glenelg Bakers Delight employed approximately 50 staff. The vast majority of the staff worked part time and were studying at school or university. The school students generally worked weekends and Thursday nights and had to be employed for a minimum of three hours. The university students often worked mornings, Monday to Friday, in the hours that they were not

having lectures. The franchisee had owned the Glenelg bakery for two years and still ran his first bakery franchise, situated in the foothills at Mitcham, which he had operated for the past seven years. He had developed a number of systems in the early years, when the head office of Bakers Delight had not provided the support that it does today, and he still used his own recruitment, induction and training techniques.

His recruiting system was different from that of other franchises and worth documenting because of its demands on potential workers. His method for selecting staff is also important to this case study in that it demonstrates that he was recruiting staff who already possessed employability attributes. Applicants participated in the demanding process because they knew that this could be the part-time job which supported them through the rest of high school and through university.

The Glenelg Bakers Delight recruiting system involved the following elements:

- *Resumes:* all applicants who had left resumes at the shop were contacted. There were usually 100–150 people. They were invited to an interview in groups of 15–30.
- *Testing:* participants were asked to undertake a numeracy test to demonstrate their ability to add two three-digit numbers and subtract three-digit numbers. They also completed an aptitude test.
- *Presentation:* applicants were asked to stand and talk about themselves for three minutes. The franchisee assessed their attitude.
- *Stress test:* applicants were told that this test was designed so they would not finish it. The test consisted of random numbers over a page. Applicants were required to join as many numbers (1–40) as they could in 30 seconds. Applicants were then narrowed down to between 5–15 people (out of the original 150).
- *Interviews:* suitable applicants were invited back for a three-minute interview. This interview was done one-to-one to refresh the franchisee's memory of the applicant and to see how they conducted themselves. The recruits were chosen as a result of this interview.

Hilton Bakers Delight

In fact, 18 to 20 staff were employed at the Hilton Bakers Delight, the majority of whom were students, studying at either university or high school. Four full-time bakers were employed. One of these bakers was studying the Certificate III in Small Business Franchising and two of the other bakers were apprentices. The shop was managed by a full-time manager.

The Bakers Delight-owned store recruited by interviewing applicants who had dropped in applications. Many of the novice workers were friends of staff or had family already working in the Hilton shop. They were interviewed before the manager looked into the other applicants.

After interviews, those who were considered suitable were given a trial shift. They were issued with a uniform and given the chance to work/observe for about one to two hours, thereby offering them the opportunity to see if the job was what they thought it would be, and giving the manager a chance to see how they interacted. If suitable they were then rostered on with an experienced worker.

Research method

Initial contact with Bakers Delight was made with the human resources, training and development consultant based at Bakers Delight head office in Adelaide. The human resources consultant was interviewed and she made the initial contact with the franchisee of the Glenelg Bakers Delight and the manager, Hilton Bakers Delight obtaining their consent for involvement in the research. Arrangements were made for the researcher to telephone the owner of the Glenelg franchise and the manager of the Hilton bakery. Interviews were then set up with the Glenelg franchisee, his wife, and two staff members and, at the Bakers Delight-owned bakery, with the manager, a co-worker and a novice employee.

Interviews with the following personnel were conducted using a tape recorder. Interviews were subsequently transcribed and written up.

Staff member	Role, duties
Human resources consultant, Bakers Delight Head Office	Recruitment for Bakers Delight-owned stores, induction training sessions
Franchisee, Glenelg Bakers Delight	Owning and managing shop
Manager, Hilton Bakers Delight	Managing shop
Currently studying for Certificate in Small Business Franchising (includes workplace assessment and small group training)	
Young workers (both young women)	Selling bread
✧ 16 years old, Year 10 student working part time (Glenelg)	
✧ 15 years old, Year 10 student, working part time (Hilton)	
Co-workers (both young women)	Selling bread
✧ 22 years old, university student working part time (Glenelg)	
✧ Older worker, previous workplace experience	

Findings

Why does the organisation recruit novice workers and how does it view them?

The human resources consultant from Bakers Delight reported that young workers were recruited to project a brand awareness and a market image of happy, smiling, young, fresh faces. That was the nature and image of the business. It was this youthful, fresh image that, in turn, attracted other young people to come and work at Bakers Delight. An additional reason for the recruitment of young workers related to the fact that they already possessed technological/computer skills. The Bakers Delights point of sale was high tech and young people adapted to this technology more readily than older new recruits. Furthermore, the work was physically demanding and the young workers generally had good fitness levels.

The franchisee of the Glenelg Bakers Delight indicated that he employed young people because wages were an issue to be considered: it was cheaper to pay loadings to the young people than pay the higher hourly rate for more senior staff. Young workers brought with them a happy relaxed attitude and they were comfortable with what they did and some of them already possessed highly developed people skills. He was not looking for retail experience when he interviewed, but rather someone who appeared as though they would listen and learn and work hard.

However, the Bakers Delight human resources consultant commented that:

These novice young workers are enthusiastic but in some cases do not know how to do simple jobs like sweeping the floor. Many of them have never swept a floor. Generally hygiene and cleanliness skills have to be taught from scratch. Their personal hygiene is good but they don't have any idea about cleanliness and hygiene in the shop.

The Hilton bakery manager noted that about half of the novice staff in their first few weeks had a problem with talking to people and being friendly; they did not have the confidence. Communicating with the general public and a range of age groups did not come easily to the novice worker; they had to be encouraged to communicate with older customers.

Most novice workers were enthusiastic, but a number demonstrated a lack of commitment. Some did not have the ability or customer skills to cope with pressure (customers waiting to be served). Others had too many other commitments and were unable to fit into shifts at work; they did not like the roster system, had a problem with punctuality and did not like the early starts. These novice workers did not last.

When interviewed, the franchisee who had shops at Glenelg and at Mitcham stated:

We target the younger ones because they haven't worked anywhere else before and they are fresh and we can show them our way and what is expected from us. If they have worked somewhere else, then they haven't learnt to work as hard, or put in as much effort and be as customer-aware as we want them to be. They need to have a lot of energy. We can train them up when they are really young and we can actually afford to train them. With the training process we put them through we have spent a lot of money on them before they earn their first dollar for us. It's an investment that we have to make.

The franchisee considered that the staff who worked for him possessed the desired employability skills because these were what he looked for in his selection process. He noted that his aim was to keep the same casual staff employed as they progressed through school and university and into professional careers. He commented:

Most of our staff tend to go on to higher education and professional jobs. We expect that. It's what we see in them when we employ them, the level of person that we target, plus our training. They leave us because they are going on to their careers.

What processes are used in the company to develop employability skills in novice workers?

Bakers Delight head office offered a three-hour induction course called 'Welcome to Bakers Delight', based on an induction booklet received by new workers, once every four weeks and conducted for new staff where possible. Induction procedures were documented and made available to franchisees, each of whom had a checklist they could work through with the new staff, although some franchisees created their own checklist.

Other formal training programs available in the workplace (and accessible through the head office) included the Certificate III in Small Business Franchising which had been tailored to Bakers Delights needs. All franchisees completed this as part of entering their business. The new owners (franchisees) completed a 16–20 weeks competency-based program in one of the training bakeries prior to entering their business. Training in the form of a Small Business Franchising Traineeship was also offered to young people in the organisation who demonstrated that they had the ability and the interest to become bakery managers or franchisees in the future. The length of time of the traineeship varied between 12 months and two years.

Hilton bakery

At this bakery, novice workers who had undergone a successful interview were given a trial shift. They were issued with a uniform and given the chance to work/observe for about 1–2 hours to see if the job was as expected. This also gave the manager a chance to see how novice workers interacted with other staff and customers.

The manager commented that they tried to employ staff that already had all or most of the employability skills. If the novice workers appeared to have the qualities the manager was looking for during the trial, they were given the job. On their first shift, the manager gave them a basic induction to the workplace and took them through a working day. She informed them where everything was. Bakers Delight had a series of written policies, including a code of conduct and a uniform policy to which new staff members were introduced.

All part-time young workers were given a welcome kit (induction booklet) and, when possible, attended the head office induction workshop. If the new staff were unable to attend the induction course, they were given the welcome kit and the shop manager went through the booklet with them. The booklet covered background to Bakers Delight as well as information on career opportunities. The '6 stages of delightful service' were also described and included a step-by-step guide to customer service:

1. The Customer Walks By
2. First Contact
3. Determining Customer Needs and Wants
4. Processing the Sale
5. Farewell Greetings
6. Customer Feedback

The Hilton manager commented that the most effective way to develop the employability skills of novice workers was to team novice workers with an experienced staff member, not just any staff member but one that the manager considered to have excellent work habits. The more experienced staff member modelled the job and the novice workers learnt by watching. One of the Hilton bakery co-workers confirmed this practice noting: 'you have to steer them in the right direction, because if you want to keep staff you have to be gentle with them when they're learning'. The manager also kept an eye on them. Much of the training took place on the job. The new staff members wore a trainee badge for the first 2–3 weeks of work which meant that the customers were more forgiving, thus enabling the novice workers to build up their confidence. The Hilton manager said that they attempted to have a staff meeting once every six weeks to discuss issues relating to the job and training. Finding the time was difficult which was why training had to take place on the job.

Franchisee

As noted earlier, the franchisee's staff selection processes were extremely demanding. It was made clear to recruits at the interviews that the job they were applying for was serious and a lot was expected of them. The novice workers were informed right from the start that they would be rostered according to their performance. A high performance had to be maintained or, if someone new came through who had more energy and drive than them, they would be expected to improve or lose rosters. If they chose not to turn up for a shift, they weren't offered work for the following two weeks. They learnt that there were strict systems in place that had to be adhered to.

Novice workers were invited to an information session at night, after the shop had closed, to teach them about Bakers Delight. They were involved in a role play which included playing, in turn, the customer and sales person. They were also shown how to slice bread. On another occasion at the shop, novice workers spent 15–30 minutes wearing neat clothes, standing on the cash register side of the counter, taking notes on how the senior staff member related to the customers.

Once employed, they were placed on a roster with more experienced, senior workers who demonstrated to them the Bakers Delight way of doing things. They were taught to inject their own personality and vitality into their behaviour. They were told that each customer should leave the shop having absorbed some 'youthful energy'. When novice workers were first employed, they were taken through the induction checklist and then through the Bakers Delight Welcome Kit (6 Stages of Delightful Service). Initially, they spent time shadowing a more experienced worker and, between customers, swept the floor and cleaned; for example, checked the other side of the counter for dropped tastings or dropped tickets, and wiped off smudges or finger marks. The franchisee's wife trained all of the staff, although if she was not available, other senior staff were used. The former was the preferred trainer since she adhered strictly to the established systems. Her training sessions were conducted one-on-one.

What do novice workers do themselves to develop their employability skills and how do they regard the development of these skills?

Most of the novice workers were still very enthusiastic, believing that they were most fortunate to have the job. Some had looked for work for a long time and they were grateful to have a job and, therefore, were prepared to work very hard.

The novice worker at Hilton commented:

I think I had a lot of these skills before I started the job but you get the chance to put them into practice and I had to refine them. I have learned to deal with the stress and the business on a Saturday morning and to become a bit more tolerant. When I feel myself getting stressed, I tell myself to let it go and breathe in and out deeply and count to 3.

She had been given this advice about how to deal with stress by one of the more experienced staff. This worker also commented that she believed that she had improved her adaptability skills. When she had first started work she realised that she was a bit set in her ways and, when shown how to do something, believed it was the only way. She learnt that other staff did things differently; for example, counted the money first and then assessed the wastage, whereas others did it the other way around. Working in Bakers Delight she had learnt to value people's differences.

The novice worker at Glenelg felt that she had matured as a result of working in Bakers Delight; for example, she did not enjoy cleaning but had come to realise how important hygiene is in a food-selling business. Moreover, as a result of making the commitment to work at Bakers Delight she begun to plan her school and social activities to accommodate her work. She felt that, as a result of working at Bakers Delight, the attributes such as commitment, reliability, team work and adaptability, she had gained would be an advantage to her when seeking other employment.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

One of the Hilton bakery co-workers suggested that training days (2–3 days) at head office would be beneficial to novice workers.

It would be good to have the time to train without the pressure of work. Sometimes the technical skills are harder to teach if the young person doesn't listen. Many young people think they know everything. They are enthusiastic but they have an 'I know it all' attitude and they don't follow instructions. Taking the time to go through things more leisurely would help them to be calmer in the workplace. They would be more confident and would get less flustered.

The Hilton novice employee suggested the need for some training in 'time-management' and 'under pressure'. She had found it difficult having time limits on communication: 'because we are busy, talking with customers is limited because of time and it is hard to know how to cut them off without offending them'.

Training in communication and people skills aimed at dealing with difficult customers was a further suggestion made by one of the novice workers. This worker also commented that some mock staff–customer training would be helpful. During pastoral care lessons at her school, mock interviews had been conducted and they had written up resumes. Nevertheless these activities had not prepared her for dealing with the public: 'this is my first experience of aggressive people, snapping at me. Here, at work, we are told to keep smiling'.

The Hilton manager believed that, with unlimited resources, it would be desirable to undertake team-building exercises designed to create a real sense of being part of a team, at the same time instilling a sense of integrity within the team.

The Glenelg franchisee believed that schools could do more, believing that students should be taught more about business, finance, and money. He thought the novice workers needed to understand the concept of working one's way up from the bottom. The franchisee also suggested that schools should spend more time on basic working maths and social values—how to deal with

other people and how to value other people. Schools should be preparing students for life, not just for exams and schools should be helping students to become more confident in speaking in front of a group of people. He felt it was important to be able to stand up in front of a group and communicate with confidence.

After seven years of employing young workers, the franchisee had identified a number of key characteristics defining novice employees. Young people from the country often had good communication skills, they liked to interact with people and showed a caring attitude. Those who were studying drama at school often communicated well in the shop. Furthermore, young people who held religious beliefs tended to be caring about other people and possessed honest values and confidence.

Are there differences between the employability skills required by, and developed in, part-time student jobs and full-time jobs?

After a few months of working with the company, the part-time staff began to take on the additional tasks given to the more experienced workers, tasks such as counting the money and assessing the wastage. These roles would have been undertaken by full-time workers in other businesses.

Bakers Delight employed very few full-time employees. The franchisee had 80–100 staff working in his two shops and only 10 of these were full-time. Of these 10, most were bakers. He thought the bakers did not need all of the employability skills required by the front-of-shop staff but he was considering taking on more bakers than necessary so that, in their surplus hours, they could be rotated and work out in the front of the store. This would give them the opportunity to deal with customers—the customers would have the chance to tell them what they thought of the products. He believed this feedback would make them better bakers and give them the opportunity to see what the front-of-shop girls were talking about.

Conclusion

In relation to the development of employability skills in young novice workers, Bakers Delight exhibited the following features:

- Bakers Delight has established systems and processes to inform, train and upskill workers.
- Both manager and franchisee agreed that they tried to select staff who already possessed employability skills and they worked on maintaining those skills.
- Both the franchisee and the manager chose to invest in training and did so very systematically.
- The staff knew the company's policies and the expected level of service required for each customer.
- Staff were rostered on performance and understood that they needed to improve their skills, not just maintain them.
- Staff were generally part-time students and many were employed over long periods of time while they completed their study, an indication that many already possessed or had developed high levels of employability skills.

CADET Group Training Company

Dawn Edwards

Introduction

CADET Group Training was part of the Community Agency for Development, Employment & Training Incorporated (CADET), a not-for-profit organisation which provided a range of services

and employment opportunities aimed at relieving unemployment and related social problems. The organisation employed ten staff (including two part-time) at its main office in Brisbane, and worked with over 100 high schools in the Sunshine Coast, Brisbane and Toowoomba regions to provide opportunities for part-time and full-time work for senior students through the school-based traineeship and apprenticeship program—with over 500 students placed with host employers. The manager of CADET felt they would 'recruit approximately 80 first-time workers per year, and this would represent around 16% of the annual intake'. This was a group scheme which relied on demand.

Two of CADET's host employers were Property Co. (Real Estate Institute of Queensland) and Steak Bar restaurant, both situated in suburbs of Brisbane.

Property Co., the state's professional association for the real estate industry, was voluntary, and supported member real estate agents with information, products and resources that complement their business practices. It also supported the community by providing relevant industry information relating to the buying and selling of property. Property Co. hosted Career Start work placements for students, and also traineeships. The Brisbane office employed approximately 60 staff, including around four young people under 20 years of age.

Steak Bar was one of 26 restaurants in a chain operating around Australia; they offered mid-priced full-service casual dining, and employed more than 1300 young people. The restaurant in Brisbane employed approximately 50 staff overall. This included four full-time staff (managers), the remainder being part-time and casual staff members (five of these were young people). The Brisbane site was the one chosen to visit for the interviews to take place. Steak Bar employed two types of trainees—school-based traineeships (where young people studied a qualification linked to part-time work) and part-time or full-time traineeships (for those who had left school). Prospective trainees also needed to complete a two-day work experience first before being accepted into a traineeship. This helped to ensure that they liked the environment and that the organisation felt the student would be suitable.

Research method

Arrangements were initially commenced through the manager of CADET. Contact was then made with the manager of the CADET Group Training in Brisbane, and the two host employers where staff would be interviewed. Discussions held were taped for transcription.

The following box sets out a list of those people interviewed, the organisation to which they belonged and some additional relevant information:

Organisation	Persons interviewed	Other information
CADET	✧ The manager	
CADET Group Training	✧ The manager, Brisbane region for group training	
	✧ Human resource manager	Traineeship in Office Administration
	✧ Supervisor (app. 6 years service)	
	✧ Co-worker (entering fifth yr)	
	✧ First-time worker (first year)	
Steak Bar restaurant	✧ Manager	Traineeship in Hospitality
	✧ Co-worker (3 years)	
	✧ First-time worker (first year)	

Findings

Why does the organisation recruit novice workers and how does it view them?

CADET Group Training

The manager indicated the organisation recruited first-time workers because they were required by various organisations for example, councils; this was a group scheme which relied on demand—in other words, they sourced what employers required. He said that all Year 10 students who expressed interest were interviewed, and a list drawn up of prospective trainees. The employer contacted CADET when trainees were required, and around three students from the list were offered an interview with the host employer. The signing-up of the successful student for the traineeship took place at the school with the registered training organisation, new apprenticeship centre, school representative, CADET representative, the student and their guardian all in attendance, and their various roles were then explained.

The employability skills that young people (aged from 14 years) needed to ensure a successful transition from school into the workplace were developed within an actual workplace. The manager believed this was important as the school system did not have the required exposure to industry to give students the necessary experience.

Property Co.

The human resource manager indicated that, often at the end of the traineeship, the organisation offered the student a full-time position. (This of course depended on the availability of a position and how the student had performed over the 12-month period.) If this were the case, then the organisation already knew the type of employee being recruited and their track record, as they had worked there previously and had actually given them some training in the industry.

Property Co. generally recruited one novice worker each year (about 1% of the annual intake) as they only employed these young people in certain circumstances; for example, when the relevant work and finance were available. The current incumbent was a school-based trainee, involving a school-based course at the successful completion of which the trainee would receive a Certificate II in Office Practice. The trainee attended work only on Fridays and attended school other days. The supervisor indicated that the special attributes Property Co. looked for in first-time workers 'were initiative, assertiveness, common sense, reliability and some computer skills, and having already given some thought to their future career'.

The traineeship gave students confidence, a good understanding of what was involved in the workplace, and additional employability skills. It was felt that schools were not able to provide these skills or environment.

Steak Bar

The manager suggested that: 'because of the type of business, managers were able to give young people the opportunity to begin as a first-time worker and perhaps later on progressing to undertake training for a career in the hospitality industry'. It also meant if the Steak Bar restaurant offered these people an apprenticeship in the future, these young people had already worked there, had an understanding of the environment, the tasks involved, and the requirements of the industry, and the employer knew what the employee was like.

The tasks involved in this industry meant there were always a variety of skills required, so the young people were able to begin carrying out basic tasks and gradually develop their skills so they could be given greater responsibility as time progressed.

What processes are used in the company to develop employability skills in novice workers?

CADET Group Training

One initiative was that the trainee was handed a type of role model on which to base their employment when they commenced the traineeship. This consisted of two lists which had been developed by the organisation, titled 'Employer expectations' (punctuality, sense of urgency, enthusiastic, team worker, self-motivated, initiative, attitude, follow instruction, effective communications, flexible) and the 'Ten commandments for customers'. The trainee was monitored by CADET fortnightly for the first month, then monthly and after 12 months, this may revert to quarterly. During Year 12 CADET Group Training conducted relevant follow-ups to ensure students actually completed traineeships. These could also lead to full-time work and apprenticeships.

The main type of problems encountered during the traineeship involved issues such as the trainee not turning up for assessment, and attitude to work and/or the employer. To resolve the problem a meeting would be called involving as many people as required (for example, host employer, trainee, CADET, guardian, school).

Property Co.

An induction process was carried out when trainees first commenced. The trainees were taken around and introduced to everyone within the organisation, the staff explained the specific role and responsibilities of everyone in the area and the safety aspect according to the supervisor. The first-time worker was involved initially in day-to-day jobs (helping him/her to become familiar with these different jobs), and having them help in other areas. This helped the trainee to feel useful and part of the team according to both the supervisor and co-worker.

The human resource manager indicated that new skills were gradually introduced, for example, doing the mail, and answering the telephone, learning to prioritise work, typing up procedures. The new employee also received mentoring from the other staff. The trainee indicated that he had workbooks to complete and assessment was conducted regularly with help from the supervisors. This particular traineeship was a school-based traineeship which sought to develop confidence, and a good understanding of what was involved in the workplace.

Steak Bar

According to the supervisor, 'staff talked to the young workers in the restaurant, explained what they themselves were doing and why'. There was particular emphasis on developing skills such as working under pressure, communication, and team environment. There were regular evaluations of how the trainees were progressing, and there were areas of opportunity (instead of negativity), highlighting the achievement of the trainee rather than the areas where more work was needed, showing the first-time worker that the organisation really cared about them. The leaders and managers within the restaurant led by example, and gave the young trainees tasks they knew they could achieve. This technique seemed to be instrumental in the development of the young people as effective workers.

Managers and key personnel used various elements from a book titled 'The one minute manager' to assist with managing the organisation and training staff; for example, 'one minute goal setting', 'one minute reprimand', and the 'one minute praising'. The organisation ensured staff read these books, understood them and used them as a guide for their work practices at the steakhouse. The young trainees heard the staff talk about the development levels and managing people within their development levels. Subsequently, managers set these young people tasks that they could achieve, and if trainees saw the other staff completing the same tasks as they were asked to do, then the trainees enjoyed working at the restaurant much more. Giving feedback straight away was

important, whether it was positive or negative. The organisation also held team meetings and developed their own procedures.

The co-worker confirmed that communication was continually developed within the organisation (listen, speak clearly), and examples set by other staff members which was important.

The young trainee considered that the way new employees were eased into the work, instead of 'putting you in the deep end' helped to develop employability skills. He also agreed that the examples other staff set to new employees were important. The main employability skills he had developed since commencing at the restaurant were communication and stress management and he had found these of great benefit.

What do novice workers do themselves to develop their employability skills and how do they regard the development of these skills?

CADET Group Training

The CADET manager said that young people now tend to undertake work experience, either through the school, family friends, or people they knew, prior to actually commencing work. Many young people seem to have some understanding of the benefits that work experience can bring. This work experience helped develop employability skills such as confidence, vibrancy, keenness to learn, and an ability to adapt to the workplaces in which they found themselves, which were those sought by CADET when employing first-time workers.

Property Co.

According to the human resource manager, Property Co. sought first-time workers with special attributes such as motivation, enthusiasm, confidence, common sense, and willingness to learn, having given some consideration about their future career for traineeships.

When interviewed, the supervisor at Property Co. considered the special attributes they required were initiative, assertiveness, common sense, reliability and some basic computer skills. The list suggested by the co-worker was quite similar, including reliability, hard-working, enjoy learning, enthusiasm, and getting along with other people.

However, the novice worker felt that his work experience with the school, good manners and team work were what contributed to his obtaining the traineeship. The trainee had undertaken a work education course at school prior to this traineeship, where he learnt how to build a resume, run a business and get a job—everything to do with working. At the end of this course he received a certificate. Since he commenced the traineeship he had found the workbooks in which he had to complete various exercises (as part of the traineeship) and also the assessments which were conducted, very useful in helping him to learn new skills. Also, the supervisors were very helpful, explaining what to do and showing him how to carry out tasks.

Steak Bar

The manager interviewed believed 'the hospitality industry looked for first-time workers who had a desire to work hard, and communicate well with people, these were very important skills for this particular industry'.

The trainee interviewed had completed work experience through his last school, and that helped a great deal. His family was also very helpful, ensuring that he developed and used the basic skills. He believed the skills needed for his job included the desire and need to work, being able to relate well with other people and enjoying being around people, and also coping well with stress. In his new traineeship he watched closely, and listened to other staff to obtain a better understanding of the requirements—that is, learning by example.

He felt he had learned to communicate with others well. He had also 'learned to listen carefully the first time when something was explained to ensure he got things right'. Learning to manage stress was a further skill that had been developed at the restaurant with the assistance of supervisors and other staff members. It was felt that these were very important skills for such a busy environment.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

CADET Group Training

The manager believed that availability of time, stress and workplace pressure were the main things which prevented development of employability skills from being more effective. Their organisation also had a set of standards for everyone to meet—staff needed to perform at a certain level. He believed in the extension of accredited training within schools, that 'every Year 11 student should be involved in workplace training, they then develop work ethic—dress, punctuality, use of manners, customer service. A problem is that you can't attract enough young people, there is insufficient industry focus, business does not have enough involvement in education'.

Property Co.

The office administration trainee was completely happy with the assistance his employer had given him to help develop these employability skills; however, other staff such as the human resources manager and supervisor suggested that employers needed to have patience and perseverance with first-time workers. Additional training procedures, and wider duties, such as those related to the exercises in the workbooks that the first-time workers completed as part of their traineeship, would also be very useful.

The supervisor felt that sometimes trainees were taken advantage of in some other organisations and needed more encouragement and support—though of course when trainees showed enthusiasm this would encourage people to help them more.

Steak Bar

Communication skills could be further developed in the hospitality industry it was felt: 'as the young people enter the 16–18-year-age group, teach them how to communicate with each other—loud, clear, conscious and accurate communication with each other'. Communication was one of those things that the restaurant sought in the interview process—so perhaps a mock interview could be useful as well to improve novice workers' skills here. According to the supervisor, school could be one avenue for this.

The co-worker felt that when there were a lot of new people, these trainees often did not know to listen carefully and if this was learnt early, it would save time and prevent mistakes. Perhaps schools could give students examples of what was needed and expected in the work environment—students could also be given more work experience.

While the trainee was quite happy with what his employer did to assist in the development of these skills, he was aware of others who were not so fortunate. He felt 'that in general young people should be encouraged and they needed back-up and self-esteem; parents often did not give enough support or understanding to young people'.

Conclusion

- Young people should be encouraged and they needed back-up from people such as supervisors and co-workers to help gain confidence and self-esteem; parents often did not give required support or understanding to young people.

- Organisations interviewed relied on developing skills such as self-esteem, communication, and learning by example. In addition, the hospitality organisation used the 'One minute manager' publication as a guide, held team meetings and developed their own procedures.
- Again first-time workers found it rather difficult to articulate how their employability skills had developed and appeared to rely mainly on giving support to their employers' comments.
- Property Co. conducted a one-day induction process, and with both hospitality and office administration traineeships, novice workers were gradually eased into the system, being given new and more demanding jobs, as they became competent.
- Schools could give students examples of what was needed and expected in the work environment; students could also be given more work experience. Courses could be run for the 16–18-year-age group to gain skills in communication.
- CADET maintained a list of prospective trainees from which candidates were short-listed as traineeships were identified. The signing of traineeships held particular importance with all relevant parties in attendance, when the specific roles and responsibilities were clearly outlined. It appeared that there were benefits for CADET Group Training operating as an intermediary to help young people settle into work; for example, trainees were closely and regularly monitored by a professional organisation already experienced in this role. Thus the employer was relieved of this particular responsibility. Also in the final year, field staff from CADET Group Training undertook follow-ups to ensure the student actually completed the traineeship. This practice represented good quality control.
- An innovative idea was the 'List of employer expectations' and the 'Ten commandments for customers', which are handed to the trainee when commencing their traineeship.
- Perceived employability skills which needed to be developed included: communication, motivation, coping with stress, confidence, common sense, reliability, initiative.
- Schools were not able to give all the employability skills required nor the relevant environment. This issue was identified at Property Co. (human resources manager), CADET (manager), and Steak Bar (co-worker).

Courier Newspapers

Sue Erickson

Introduction

Courier Newspapers published 11 local newspapers, covering Adelaide's entire metropolitan area from Gawler in the north to Victor Harbour on the south coast. The head office for Courier Newspapers was located at Port Adelaide. The paper's journalists and marketing and circulation sections located here; the paper was also printed here. Four branch offices were located in suburbs around Adelaide. The 11 region-specific papers had a weekly readership of 658 000. Each paper featured editorial written especially for the residents of that community. The papers were delivered weekly to more than 507 000 homes and businesses. The Courier Newspaper also provided advertisers with the option of inserting material into the newspapers' plastic delivery bags (catalogues, pamphlets, vouchers etc.). The Courier Newspaper was the only free suburban paper. It relied on advertising to cover production and, where possible, costs had to be kept down.

The newspapers were delivered by part-time workers, mainly school children (both boys and girls), who were known as paper couriers. Courier employed almost 1600 couriers who performed the final stage of the suburban delivery. Each year saw almost 100% turnover of these courier jobs. Once the winter months came, the young workers dropped off while many moved on to other jobs where the financial rewards were higher.

Courier also employed eight mature people who worked part time as area supervisors. Seven of these area supervisors were women, six of whom had worked as supervisors for over 13 years.

Most of them took on the job years ago when their children were couriers. Their role was to assist with any problems or questions the couriers might have. Their other duties included spot checks, following up on complaints, and making sure that each courier obtained the correct number of papers needed for their round.

Delivery jobs were advertised in every Courier newspaper weekly. Potential applicants were required to complete an application with name, address, date of birth and parents' signature, if under 18 years. The circulation manager selected new couriers based on neatness of their handwriting on the application form and any references attached to the application. Those with references from teachers, scout leaders, parents' business associates etc. were selected first. The parents were contacted to check that the applicant could work to a routine and was able to make a commitment to the job.

Once selected for a courier round, their names were given to the area supervisor. Subsequently the successful applicants were sent a courier's handbook, an induction booklet and the name of their supervisor.

In terms of the actual newspaper delivery process, the driver dropped the papers, any advertising inserts and plastic bags at the young courier's home. The papers were dropped off to the couriers' homes on Tuesday and had to be delivered by Wednesday evening—whatever the weather. At the courier's home the paper was folded and inserts added if there were any. The paper was then put into the plastic bag. Couriers either delivered the newspapers in their allocated area on bikes or were driven by car by their parents (particularly the case for very young couriers). Payments for couriers varied, depending on the size of the paper (number of pages). Additional money was payable on weeks when inserts were required. The average rate was $2.50 per 100 newspapers and 2 cents per copy for inserts. The average courier round involved delivering approximately 250–300 papers. Payment was banked monthly.

Research method

Interviews with the following personnel were undertaken using a tape recorder. Interviews were subsequently transcribed and written up.

Position	Role, duties
Circulation manager	Recruiting and hiring couriers, overseeing supervisors, managing the delivery process and organising the courier pay
Area supervisor	Supervising the (195) couriers, including dismissing unsatisfactory couriers
Young couriers	Delivering newspapers once per week
✧ 16 years old, Year 11 student (girl)	
✧ 13 years old, Year 8 student (boy)	
Mother of young courier, assisted her son and could be considered a co-worker	Assisted in the folding of newspapers

Findings

Why does the organisation recruit novice workers and how does it view them?

The system of using delivery couriers had been established many years ago when the company had been smaller. As the paper grew, so did the number of deliverers. It was part of the organisation's 'community' image to have young boys and girls riding on their bikes delivering the newspapers.

Since there was almost 100% turnover of these courier jobs each year, it was a constant cycle of recruitment, with the advertisement for new couriers featuring in every weekly paper. In the couriers' induction booklet, it states: 'Many prominent local personalities began their early life as

Courier Newspaper couriers. The fact that you are prepared to work and earn your own income says a lot for your attitude towards life.'

Because many of the couriers were in their very early teens, they lacked the organisational skills and the commitment necessary for the job. The mother of one of the couriers interviewed here as a 'co-worker' commented that the young courier was often easily distracted and did not begin folding his papers immediately they arrived. She also commented that many young couriers lacked an understanding of time management. Those interviewed believed that most parents helped their children—with both the folding and the distribution stages of the paper run.

Once the couriers became teenagers, the money wasn't good enough for them. They indulged in horseplay, throwing papers at windows and cars, not doing the delivery or completing the round late and losing interest. If they did not do the round correctly, they were sacked. The supervisor did spot checks and soon identified any malpractice. Customers also phoned if they had not received their paper.

However, the fact that the money was so poor may have contributed to many of the older couriers' lack of interest in the job. (One of the interviewees commented that young couriers were probably paid around $2 per hour.) Arguably, if these young workers did not feel that they were valued members of the team/organisation (some may even have felt that they were being exploited), then they would be less likely to display the employability attributes of commitment, reliability etc.

What processes are used in the company to develop employability skills in novice workers?

When asked this question the supervisor commented: 'we expect the couriers to be motivated, reliable and committed. We don't take any specific steps to develop these skills but, by doing their job, they will develop the skills.'

The induction booklet was helpful and gave a written guide to the history of the paper, road safety, safety houses, how to fold inserts and papers, what to do if involved in an accident, and delivering the papers themselves. The booklet also contained a map of the area and payment details, the name and contact number of the supervisor and advised the courier to contact the supervisor when they had completed their first round—or any other time if they had any questions. Sometimes, the parents telephoned the supervisor for their child because the child was quite shy. Other children were good communicators and the supervisor was amazed at the telephone skills of some of the young 10 to 12-year-old couriers.

The supervisor commented that this induction booklet did not work as well as it could because the new workers did not get the induction booklet until they received the first delivery of newspapers. Some of them did not read the booklet properly because they were too anxious to get the papers folded and delivered. However, some of the new couriers telephoned the supervisor before their first delivery and talked through the process with her and therefore got details of the job sooner.

Because of limited financial resources the company was unable to provide adequate induction for new couriers. Some new recruits abandoned their rounds after a couple of days—presumably because they felt they were unable to continue with so little support.

What do novice workers do themselves to develop their employability skills and how do they regard the development of these skills?

One of the young couriers commented that she had telephoned the supervisor many times and sought advice and information from her. She also noted that her planning and organising skills had improved and she believed that she had become more reliable and had learnt to manage time more effectively. She had also developed a system to save time and money when delivering the papers and had learnt from other people's experiences.

The young worker was aware that the previous occupant of one of her rounds had been dismissed as unreliable, a situation which made the young worker consider employability attributes such as reliability and commitment. She recognised the importance of these attributes if she were to keep her job. This young worker also considered she already possessed many of the required skills before working for the Courier, but she had learnt to be more reliable realising that, if she wasn't, there would be complaints and she would lose her job.

The other young novice commented on how hard he had had to work to make some pocket money. He had left the Courier and was now working in a supermarket stocking shelves. He was happier in his new job where he was paid $8 per hour and the shifts were a minimum of four hours.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

When asked for an opinion on this question, the supervisor commented that costs involved in setting up a program to develop these skills would be prohibitive. However she noted that couriers would benefit from more time being spent on induction; furthermore, they would enjoy meeting other couriers at a three-hour induction, with some personal contact between them and the employer. They could also be given the opportunity to tour the printing area. They would then feel less isolated and more part of a team.

It was also suggested that, in the first few weeks, the supervisor should contact the couriers on a regular basis to see how they were faring rather than leaving it up to them to contact her. To minimise company costs, couriers were expected to contact the supervisor with any questions they may have.

Conclusion

In relation to the development of employability skills for young novice workers at Courier Newspapers, the following points emerged:

- The organisation employed a large number of novice workers, some as young as 10 years old. Their employment with the newspaper was often an introduction to the working world. Most young people did the work to earn pocket money and were often assisted by their parents.
- The Courier put very little emphasis on training the young workers in employability skills. The supervisor best described it by saying 'by doing the job they will develop the skills'. Courier Newspapers considered itself a community organisation and was unable to allocate resources to any formal training or induction process.
- More often than not, it was the parents who were helping the novice worker to learn employability skills. Parents helped them to plan their routes, manage their time, communicate with the supervisor and obtained help from other household members so that, with teamwork, they met their deadline.
- The high turnover rate of novice workers reflected a lack of challenge in the job and a lack of 'belonging' to an organisation, arguably also due to the very low rate of pay.

Fiona's Art of Hair

Paul Comyn

Introduction

This case study involved a medium-sized hairdressing salon, Fiona's Art of Hair, which was located in Corrimal, one of the traditional working-class suburbs to the north of Wollongong. The salon was located away from the main street but opposite an entrance to the local shopping centre. It had

been operating for 12 years, and employed nine staff, three of whom were part-time employees. Full-time staff included the owner–manager Fiona Heslop.

The salon had a reputation as being one of the better local hairdressers, and all staff indicated that it was a 'good place to work'.

The salon was recognised in 1999 through the Australian National Training Authority-sponsored training awards when it received the New South Wales Small Business Training Award, and was subsequently shortlisted in the Prime Minister's Final Four for the national award. The training and learning culture within the salon was strongly influenced by the owner–manager who at the time was a board member of the National Wholesale Retail and Personal Services Industry Training Council (National WRAPS).

Research method

The data-gathering involved a combination of telephone and face-to-face interviews. Contact with the owner–manager was initially made by phone and followed up by an interview in the salon, which coincided with introductions to other staff. Subsequent visits to the salon enabled further interviews of one hour's duration to be conducted with various staff. Details of those interviewed are shown in the box below:

Staff member	Role
Manager	Owner–manager
Senior stylist	Supervisor
Junior stylist	Co-worker
Apprentice	Novice worker

Hand-written notes were taken during the interviews and follow-up discussions were also held with the owner–manager to clarify points of detail.

Findings

Why does the organisation recruit novice workers and how does it view them?

The salon employed one or two novice workers each year on a full-time basis. The attitude of the manager was that she saw benefit in taking on novice workers because they 'could train them to do the job the way it is done in the salon. They are like an empty slate that you can mould a bit to do things you want them to do'.

Wage differentials were also noted as an incentive to employ young people. The manager believed that older stylists or those with previous industry experience were more costly in terms of wages. She also felt that there was a higher turnover rate with more experienced employees who often left to establish their own salons or to gain broader experience once they had completed their apprenticeship. In addition, a desire to contribute to the ongoing vitality of the industry coupled with the satisfaction gained from teaching young people skills were also cited as reasons for employing novice workers.

The manager and both stylists also believed that new employees with previous industry experience often brought 'bad habits with them'. Notwithstanding this, novice workers with relevant previous work experience were not overlooked, as demonstrated by the current junior staff member who had previous training as a beauty technician.

While it was recognised that novice workers couldn't be expected to come to a job with fully developed employability skills, all those interviewed believed that novice workers possess both positive and negative attributes. Attitudes shared amongst staff towards novice workers are shown in the following box.

Positive attributes	Negative attributes
Enthusiastic	Limited life experience
Willing to learn	Poor communication skills
Eager to please	Relationship/social/personal problems
Inquisitive	Associated parental intervention
Responsive	Lack of interest/initiative
Task oriented	Lazy
Creative	Complain about helping others
Asking questions all the time	Won't do as they are asked

While these attitudes were acknowledged as being the good and the bad of novice workers, those interviewed believed that they were generally a consequence of the level of maturity possessed by young people as a whole, and what would be expected from young people entering the workforce.

What processes are used in the company to develop employability skills in novice workers?

The development of employability skills amongst novice workers began with the way that new staff were recruited to the salon. The salon took an approach that attempted to assess the suitability of potential candidates through involvement with local VET-in-school programs. Indeed, the salon's initiative of approaching local schools provided some impetus to improving work placement arrangements in the local area. This arrangement evolved to involve approximately six local schools which sent a student to the salon for a week-long placement four times a year.

During these placements, students were 'buddied up' with a junior staff member for the week. As noted by the manager, this gave the salon an opportunity to assess the suitability of the students as well as providing some responsibility to junior staff who gave basic on-the-job training to the students.

By the end of the placement, the school students were able to complete basic treatments and would have an understanding of how the salon works. If the students impressed the owner, then they got their 'foot in the door' and were offered part-time work when it became available. The opportunity provided by these placements was also available to a limited extent to those novice workers who approached the salon directly. In these cases, candidates were given a half-day trial, with the manager noting that they were 'assessed mainly on how they fit in and relate to those around them'. These recruitment processes placed an emphasis on communication skills, with students or candidates not being offered further opportunity if they 'couldn't have a conversation'. Similarly, extra-curricula activities and measures other than school results were considered when recruiting novice workers, and those candidates that did not bring evidence of extra-curricula activities were viewed by the manager as being at a disadvantage.

Once novice workers were recruited, they were shown the basic procedures in the salon through a buddy system. While new staff were introduced to some technical aspects during the early stages, the main emphasis was on customer relations, communications and teamwork within the salon. New staff also participated in weekly staff meetings that involved the whole salon team. The manager, senior stylist, junior stylist and apprentice all noted that staff meetings were an important way to encourage teamwork and communication skills amongst all staff, including novice workers. The manager suggested that communication, teamwork and self-management skills were keenly emphasised during these sessions as well as through the ongoing work of the salon. She also suggested that in-house training aimed to develop both technical and employability skills amongst novice workers.

Weekly training goals for novice workers were determined during the staff meetings and managed through the buddy system. Here the strengths of more senior staff were matched with the skill needs of novice workers. Ultimately, novice workers were 'buddied up' over time with each staff member of the salon so that they learnt different approaches to technical skills, while at the same

time having employability skills emphasised and refined differently by each staff member. The buddy system had a strong emphasis on teamwork and communication skills, with problem-solving and dealing with information developed through being introduced to the full range of tasks in the salon over time. The manager had established this approach because she felt that it allowed staff to be exposed to a range of different approaches to technical skills and levels of maturity that all impacted on the development of employability skills. Thus novice staff were introduced to increasing levels of difficulty and responsibility in the salon in a way that sought to explicitly develop both technical and non-technical skills.

Novice workers were also exposed to vendor training sessions that were organised by the manager for all salon staff. Vendor training was provided by sales representatives of various companies that supplied consumables and hairdressing equipment to salons. These sessions were organised so that all staff were aware of developments in products and styles, and were viewed by the senior stylist, who had been with the salon for eight years, both as encouraging the development of learning skills and an attitude that values lifelong learning.

Staff meetings also involved the use of scenarios to develop problem-solving and teamwork skills amongst all staff. Initiated by the manager, they provided all staff with an opportunity to 'talk through' different possible scenarios involving customers in the salon. These were not documented and were introduced verbally by the manager when time permitted. Skills in dealing with information were developed amongst all salon staff through their dealings with a formalised system of client records and appointments. Novice staff were encouraged by team members to quickly become familiar with the functioning of these records. The senior stylist noted that once they were familiar with them, novice workers were 'expected to work with them as part of the team dealing with daily work demands'.

The salon was also actively involved in World Skills and other industry competitions. Over a number of years, the salon had been involved in regional, national and international competitions, which in some cases required fundraising by candidates. The manager has required all novice workers to enter the competitions as these were seen to be a vehicle for developing initiative and enterprise amongst staff. The manager noted that 'training plans are developed by the team for each competitor, taking account of their strengths and weaknesses. The competition season is a busy time for the salon'. All those interviewed had the attitude that the salon team shared responsibility for developing both technical and non-technical skills of novice workers. This seemed to be particularly important because it was a way of ensuring that there were shared understandings about how work was to be done in the salon. The manager, senior stylist and junior stylist all noted that the professional atmosphere within the salon was seen to motivate and encourage novice workers who came to 'understand that some attention was being paid to them' through the various training opportunities and the focus on learning. Those interviewed also believed that the ongoing development of both technical and non-technical skills was important to the development of the novice workers as hairdressing professionals.

What do novice workers do themselves to develop their employability skills and how do they regard the development of these skills?

Both the apprentice and the junior stylist interviewed in the salon emphasised previous casual employment as being important to the development of their employability skills. Previous part-time employment was seen as important, particularly in relation to communication skills and teamwork, but also in terms of simply developing an awareness of what behaviour was expected at work as well as the attitudes of reliability and punctuality. For the junior stylist in particular, previous work as a beauty therapist was seen as being particularly important for introducing her to 'what work was about'. Relatedly, this previous work experience also developed initiative and enterprise because she 'started thinking about running [her] own business and realised that hairdressing was worth doing so that more could be offered in the salon'. In addition to previous employment experience, the senior stylist, junior stylist and apprentice also emphasised the nature of work at the salon and the way that communication, problem-solving and team skills are developed through the way that work

is organised in the team. The apprentice and the junior stylist both indicated that they felt that these skills were best developed when senior staff clearly explained the task and then demonstrated what was required. They both valued being given time to repeat the task, although both also expressed some discomfort with having to learn the different approaches to similar tasks that each senior stylist had developed.

The apprentice and junior stylist also both referred to the various training activities held in the salon as being relevant to the development of their employability skills.

The manager, senior stylist and junior stylist however, all felt that previous work experience sometimes developed 'bad habits' that often included inappropriate attitudes towards aspects of the job and other members of the team. Salon staff also had mixed views about the role that schooling played in developing the employability skills of novice workers. While the apprentice accepted that maturity contributed to the development of her employability skills, she also felt that by completing her final years of schooling (Year 12 in New South Wales), she had improved her communication skills, her learning skills and her ability to deal with information. She had been involved in a Design and Technology Course (precursor to contemporary New South Wales VET-in-schools courses) and had been required to develop a business strategy and a business plan for a business idea as a team. She felt that this helped her 'think about work and a career' and thus focus clearly on the world of work and the skills and attitudes related to it. The apprentice and the junior stylist both referred to their further studies at TAFE as being relevant to the development of their employability skills. Notwithstanding these elements, all those interviewed believed that the attributes of individuals often predetermined the extent to which particular employability skills could be developed, and thus in some ways, employability skills were seen to be innate things that the senior stylist suggested 'you either had or you didn't'.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

All those interviewed noted that the limitations of time and the operational demands in the salon combined to limit the opportunities to develop employability skills on the job.

Notwithstanding these constraints, all those interviewed suggested that more one-on-one training and coaching would have been of use, whereby senior staff could take the time to spend more time one to one with novice workers. In particular, the apprentice believed that this would allow senior staff to 'deal more with the individual and that individual's learning style'. Similarly, the senior stylist felt that more time could be allocated to team meetings so that staff could be 'more open with each other' and discuss in more detail the issues affecting the workgroup.

While off-the-job training was also noted as an important element of employability skills development, the manager expressed some concerns over its quality and relevance, and felt that more should be done through this medium even though it was 'outside the control of the salon'. It was also suggested by the manager that individual training plans could be documented more formally and possibly 'linked to a more structured induction program'. Again, the apprentice felt that the amount of time spent with novice workers was important because 'getting to know the person would allow a solution for that individual focussing on their strengths and weaknesses'. The apprentice and junior stylist also felt that the buddy system could be improved if the senior stylists were more systematic in the way that they demonstrated and explained procedures and practices to novice workers within the salon.

It was also suggested by the manager that after a novice worker's induction, a basic skills training program focussing on some of the basic elements of employability skills could be used and included in the recruitment/induction material.

Specific motivational training was also suggested by the junior stylist as a way to develop the 'right attitudes and confidence' that were seen to be important in supporting the development of specific employability skills. In terms of industry and employers more broadly, the manager felt that industry associations had a role in encouraging individual employers to focus more on these skills

and possibly provide some resources to assist individual enterprises, and the senior stylist suggested that employers should receive some training on how to develop employability skills amongst novice workers. All staff interviewed believed that it was not solely the responsibility of employers to develop employability skills.

The apprentice and junior stylist in particular, believed that schools had to do more to focus on the development of these skills. Indeed the manager believed that the development of employability skills should be an outcome measure of VET-in-schools programs and that more space should be created in the curriculum for these programs.

Are there differences between the employability skills required by, and developed in, part-time student jobs and full-time jobs?

All those interviewed believed that there was no difference between the employability skills required by part-time workers as opposed to full-time workers. There were differences identified between novice and more experienced workers, with the manager suggesting that problem-solving and self-management skills were not required to the same extent by novice workers.

Generally speaking, all those interviewed believed that new staff with previous employment experience had better developed employability skills. In saying this, both the manager and senior stylist felt that novice workers straight from school could possess equal levels of employability skills, although 'it depended on the school and the teachers'. It was also felt by the manager, senior stylist and junior stylist that previous part-time or casual work experience was no guarantee of better developed employability skills. In particular, the manager and the senior stylist suggested that 'an individual's personality and their values had as much to do with employability skills'.

Conclusion

Fiona's Art of Hair was a contemporary salon that presented at a standard above that expected for its locale. Similarly, the systems and procedures in place to support novice workers were well-developed, with plans for further improvement also envisaged. Ultimately, the manager and the salon team took most of the responsibility for developing the employability skills of novice workers, and in particular, the findings suggest that:

- The development of employability skills amongst novice workers at Fiona's Art of Hair seemed to be developed through:
  - regular team meetings
  - the use of a buddy system
  - rotation amongst senior staff
  - maintaining a training culture.
- Novice workers valued one-to-one communication, personal support and motivation and they believed that this contributed to the development of employability skills.
- The development of employability skills could be improved by more one-on-one dialogue between senior staff and novice workers.

Hamburger House

Erica Smith

Introduction

Hamburger House was a large multi-national fast food chain with about 220 Australian restaurants, of which the majority were company-operated with a small percentage of franchises. The company was expanding, with another 20 restaurants planned for the 12 months after the interviews took place. Each restaurant employed around 50 staff of whom around ten were normally full time. The

remainder were mainly permanent part-timers, with a small percentage of casual workers. Hamburger House preferred to place its student workers onto permanent contracts to gain their motivation and commitment.

Restaurants had a seating area for patrons, often also with a special room for children's parties and a drive-through service. Shop floor staff, called 'crew members', worked at the counter, on 'dining room' duties which meant keeping the seating area clean and tidy, on drive-through serving customers, or in the 'burger room', that is, the kitchen. Restaurant managers were generally in their 20s and 30s and were supported by assistant managers who were generally younger. The company was highly systems-focussed with a set procedure for everything; for example, there were seven steps to serving a customer and four steps to training staff. Careful attention was paid to ensuring that products were identical from restaurant to restaurant. There was little room for innovation or questioning of procedures.

Research method

The case study was undertaken in July 2002 in Melbourne. At each of two suburban restaurants, the following staff were interviewed: the manager, a recently appointed crew member whose initial full-time job[5] this was, and a crew member of at least one year's standing were interviewed. Following this, an in-depth interview took place with the Hamburger House national training manager at the company's head office in Burwood. Interviews took between 20 and 45 minutes and were undertaken privately. Interviews were taped and transcribed, except in one case where equipment failure necessitated note-taking. In addition, copies of the 'Crew member handbook' (for new staff) and the 'Crew management folder' (for restaurant managers) were inspected.

The staff interviewed and their roles are contained in the box below.

Name (pseudonym)	Position	Notes
John	National training manager	
Susan	Manager	Second restaurant as manager; three weeks at this restaurant.
Peter (age 19)	First-time worker	Two months in the job. Had done a year at university and deferred second year. On a traineeship.
Tara (age 18)	Experienced worker	18 months in the job (first 15 as part-time student worker).
George	Manager	First store as manager; 18 months at this restaurant.
Matt (age 17)	First-time worker	Third day in the job. On a traineeship.
Lisa (age 15)	Experienced worker, Oakleigh	Started working for the company part time at age 13; her mother had to apply for a special work permit for her.

Both restaurants were clean and bright and were located on major highways. They were not overly busy at the time of the interviews, although the managers were seen to be very busy with a variety of tasks, and interviews with them were interrupted several times. The managers were observed to have good relationships with their staff.

Findings

Why does the organisation recruit first-time workers and how does it view them?

Restaurants typically had their heaviest trading outside school hours and so part-time school children were ideally suited as workers. As John put it:

[5] In both cases, they had undertaken some casual work previously. Both had worked in parents' workplaces, coincidentally both in pharmacies, and Matt had also had a few days' work with a recycling service.

Our business is transient for our staff. People come to us looking for an income while studying whatever profession they want to take. Very rarely do we get a youngster who says 'I want to be with you for the rest of my life'.

However, there were career paths available for those who wished to stay with the company. The majority of Hamburger House new staff were first-time workers and most were student workers. The company was now recruiting most new staff (part time and full time alike) into traineeships. The employment and training subsidies received from the government were to be used to employ 'training consultants' who would look after training at a small number of restaurants, ideally one consultant per two restaurants.

The interviews with crew members supported John's statement about the 'transience' of Hamburger House as a place of employment. The two first-time workers, who were both 'day time' workers on near full-time hours were not committed long term to the company. Peter had needed to find employment after deciding not to continue immediately with his university studies, and his parents were pressuring him to find work. Hamburger House was geographically convenient and he knew the store as a customer. Matt had left school in Year 11 following a disciplinary incident and after desultory casual employment had come to Hamburger House because a friend worked there. Despite the somewhat haphazard way in which they had come into employment, Peter was viewed as highly competent by the experienced crew member interviewed, and Matt appeared full of confidence and was enjoying his job immensely. The two longer-serving crew members had entered into their current positions more purposefully. Both had been working for the company as part-time student workers and had left school to work at Hamburger House. Lisa had not even completed Year 10. She said, 'It was getting a bit boring at school and I wanted to work full time. I love working so it was great'.

It was clear that workers were carefully screened for appropriate characteristics. Managers wanted people who had, to some extent, good communication skills, appropriate presentation, honesty and enthusiasm. As George put it, they had to have 'the winning edge'. Moreover, they needed to have the appropriate attributes to fit in with the current team. For example, if there was a general problem with communication among the crew, a restaurant would need to look for staff with good communication skills already in place. The 'Crew management folder' provided to all restaurant managers, instructed managers to evaluate the following qualities: punctuality; appearance; manners/smile; self-expression; enthusiasm; motivation; attentiveness; age (if under 20); ability to do the job; availability; commitment; reliability; transport; social and teamwork, as well as education and previous work experience. All attributes were to be rated following the interview. The rating form gave guidelines for some, but not all, of these attributes.

The different participants' views about first-time workers' characteristics, based on their experiences with Hamburger House are shown in the box below. Direct quotes are in italics.

Type of participant	Positive characteristics of first-time workers	Negative characteristics of first-time workers
National training manager	Easily trainable because of their lack of experience elsewhere. Some have common sense, usually developed through some past experience. Motivated (except the ones who are working because their parents make them). Technology skills (from computer games etc).	Most have few employability skills. Personal presentation generally not suitable for work although appropriate for their peer group. Sense of loyalty and reliability relates to friends rather than to work.
Restaurant managers	Loyal to the company Eager and keen. *You get the full support of parents.* Content to learn steadily rather than itching for promotion.	Learning process is harder for them. *They don't hear anything at first because they are nervous.* *Shy.* *They don't say what's on their mind.* *They don't think outside the box.*

First-time workers		Find a full working day long. Difficult to remember procedures for tasks. Nervous.
Co-workers	*They have lots of energy.*	They do not take responsibility. They can only perform a few tasks. They're *clueless.* *They come for the social life.*

The box illustrates very plainly that restaurant managers were the most likely group to see positive attributes in first-time workers. The national training manager, while being well-disposed towards them, mainly saw the areas which needed development. For example when discussing reliability he said:

They have no idea. They don't understand the responsibilities associated with what they've entered into. They're still in party mode: 'If my friend's got a party Friday night that's more important that me going to work. If I don't go it's the end of the world … '

The experienced workers who worked alongside the new workers were quite disparaging about them, perhaps as a result of their comparatively recent elevation from being new workers themselves. However, the managers noted their enthusiasm and willingness to try hard. The managers who were interviewed relished their role of introducing young people to working life.

The following two comments were made by the two managers:

Kids are like a sponge. I like to take them on because I will be a major influence on them throughout their life. They will reflect back on it one day and say 'Gee I learned a lot from George'.

I prefer to have junior people. It's like, you know, if you have a puppy, like a pet, and training them to put in the work that you want.

It was interesting to note the importance of the first-time workers' parents in the employment relationship. The manager at Moorabbin said:

We can work alongside their parents. It's a three-way relationship. We are happy to talk to parents about any problems.

Parents were asked to sign the Crew member handbook and were asked to attend disciplinary interviews. Lisa, one of the experienced workers, on the other hand, was quite clear that she thought the new workers should not rely on their parents:

They get their parents to ring up for them if they're sick. I hate that. And if they have a problem their parents ring up.

Thus among the workers themselves, there was a perception that parents should not be involved in what they perhaps saw as a step into the real adult world, whereas the managers perceived first-time workers as engaged in a transition between childhood and adulthood with the need for their parents' support. The national training manager showed a clear awareness that the first-time workers were still very young:

You're lucky if anyone would own a diary and record when they're working. In most cases they write it on a piece of paper and lose the paper and don't turn up for their shifts.

What processes are used in the company to develop employability skills in first-time workers?

As mentioned earlier, successful applicants for Hamburger House needed to have certain levels of employability skills. Managers believed that some skills and attributes such as base-level communication skills and honesty had to be pre-existing. Others such as enthusiasm, motivation,

teamwork, and commitment could be developed and the company worked hard at developing those skills.

Orientation was seen to be a basis for successful skill development. As the Crew management folder put it:

The orientation of a new staff member is an important step in the overall development of the new employee. A thorough and complete orientation will make a good first impression on the trainee and will make them feel welcomed and have a sense of direction as well as having an understanding of their responsibilities. Training will be easier because the staff members' questions and worries about the job are answered and they will be able to concentrate on what they are learning. They will also see that we are professional and concerned about them.

Orientation was always carried out by the restaurant manager and not delegated. This seemed to be important to the first-time workers to make them feel valued and part of the workplace. John said that it was about three to six months before first-time workers became effective, and that during this training period, team work and communication skills were being developed along with technical skills.

There seemed to be two major thrusts of company practice with relation to first-time workers. One was to integrate the young people into the work team and the other was to instil work habits into them. With relation to the first, John said:

We do a good job with introducing them to the work station but not such a good job with introducing them to the work team. As you know when you are bringing them into an already structured environment where people have their relationships established. You have to introduce them to the group itself otherwise people remain on the outer and it can be a very icy first few weeks of employment before someone warms up to bring the person in.

The restaurants hired staff in groups to aid their integration into the store. It was seen as vital to have a group with whom to identify. George noted that those new staff who had worked previously somewhere else seemed to be able to identify a suitable group in the existing crew and attach themselves to it; first-time workers would 'go home straight from work'. He helped new cohorts of workers get to know each other and the existing staff by three simple strategies during their initial induction training. During the initial tour for the new staff he gave the new people a work history of the existing staff so that new people had a sense of where everyone fitted in.

Secondly, when the new staff were together in the training room he made an excuse and left them alone for ten minutes, during which time the ice was generally broken. In addition he invited the new staff to a fortnightly team-leader meeting. This not only gave the new staff an idea of the way the whole store was run and the important issues, but also helped the team leaders to get to know the new staff better.

Susan had some different strategies. She saw the main task as instilling confidence into them and hence stayed with each new staff member throughout his or her first shift and then buddied them with a senior crew member. This crew member was always one with an appropriate attitude and, importantly, one who was 'popular'. As she put it:

They [the senior crew members] are the people who've got a lot of energy and have had experience with these new people. I put them together so that some of that will rub off on the new crew member and make them more comfortable. The more they feel comfortable then the more they think 'Oh, hang on, I belong to these people'.

In addition Susan discouraged people from referring to new workers as 'new'. She said, 'I say they are employees as soon as they walk through the door. They are not new any more'. Susan felt that the attitude of her assistant managers was all-important. The restaurant, which she had just taken over, had a poor record in terms of labour turnover and staff satisfaction. This was supported by comments of the staff; Tara said 'Everyone doesn't like working here' and Peter said that the main thing which would stop him seeking a permanent job in Hamburger House was the way staff were treated by the managers.

Discussion with the experienced crew members indicated that the detailed strategies followed by the managers were necessary because the first-time workers were unlikely to receive a great deal of support from the other crew members. Tara remarked that:

A lot of kids have their cousins or brothers and sisters coming through. Everyone treats them good.

However, those without such contacts were not welcomed in the same way. She noted that although people usually helped new staff to some extent, the support they received was dependent on their personalities:

If they're a little nerd or something it's hard. If a kid's all open at the beginning everyone likes working with them and they learn faster.

Lisa made a very similar comment:

People who aren't confident don't last—they don't talk to anyone. They don't respond to approaches. Maybe they're scared.

First-time workers were not entirely unsupported by other staff. Tara said that if she saw someone who was looking a little isolated:

I ask them how they're going and if they like it. And I say 'No one likes it, it doesn t matter'.

It might be debatable as to whether this would reassure the new crew member.

As well as integrating into the work team, first-time workers needed to develop work habits. These included learning the balance between work and fun while in the workplace. Matt commented that it was acceptable to chat while on the job (and the Crew member handbook permits 'dating', although not with managers) but that it was necessary at times to focus purely on the job. Tara noted that among the younger first-time workers the need to knuckle down and get on with work came as a shock:

They're little kids. It's like a babysitting joint, that's how they see it. They come here really to have fun, but they get told off by the older staff. It's like detention for them really. They meet new kids and make new friends and they want to have fun but the manager makes them work. They don't understand that at all. Like we've got 13-year-olds working here. What do they understand? It's socialising for them.

It was thus a major task for managers and fellow workers to turn the focus of these young people into a commitment to working and an understanding of the operations of a business. It was noted by several participants that those who worked in the day time as their major activity were more committed than the student workers, because they relied on their jobs for money and also because they tended to be older. John said, of first-time workers:

So we have to help them understand that they've made a commitment, they have taken on basic level adult responsibilities. In lots of ways we help them on that journey from being young teenagers to young adults.

Various strategies were utilised to develop communication skills. Susan said that she encouraged staff to ask questions all the time. That way not only did the new workers get the information they needed, but they also learned more about the others in their team. She was also conscious of the need to teach the first-time workers company jargon such as the meaning of 'wash up'. A sense of humour was seen by most people as important. John mentioned that after about three months people 'start to come out of their shells. They show character and personality and with that comes humour'. It was often up to managers to show staff how to use humour appropriately while still maintaining a professional image and not offending customers.

Susan noticed that after a couple of weeks the initial enthusiasm of the young people wore off and when she noticed this happening she made a conscious effort to train them in new tasks to keep their interest. This also helped them understand where their role fitted in within the total operation. Tara also noticed that when first-time workers were given a wider range of tasks they learned more

quickly. She said that those who failed to impress in the first few shifts were often kept on one task only. Training other staff was one new task which helped to develop confidence. As Tara said:

When I was still new I trained a girl and that's when I felt better about myself. I felt that I knew a lot. Once they get a kid to train someone else they feel better about their job.

The ability to deal with stress was an attribute mentioned by several participants. It was notable that the company did not seem to like to use the word 'stress' but instead used the word 'pressure'. In this way stress was presented as something within the person, while the working environment created only pressure. John gave the example of a bus load of customers turning up; he said this would create excitement and a gearing up but need not create stress. Susan said 'having the capability to handle pressure is not the same as dealing with stress'. This value seemed to have been internalised by the crew members: Peter, one of the new workers, said 'stress is more a crew member thing—you have to deal with it yourself'. Managers commented that they thought the stress in the young part-time workers' lives came primarily from school exams especially in the final year of school.

John said that he believed that the main stressor for the first-time workers in the company was balancing work, school, family and friends. Because of the hours of operation, even those no longer at school had clashes with social and family life. Managers were flexible in accommodating workers' outside activities. Susan indicated that she would go to considerable lengths to retain staff when time off was an issue. For student workers, although the Crew members' handbook stated clearly that extended time off over exam periods was not allowed, in fact managers did allow such leave. It was not in their interests to lose good staff with the busy Christmas and holiday period following soon after exams. During the store visit, observation was made of a crew member negotiating his shifts around his outside commitments. Such flexibility clearly paid a part in motivating and retaining staff, while also developing their negotiation skills.

What do first-time workers do themselves to develop their employability skills?

Peter thought his communication skills developed naturally as the result of meeting different types of people within the workplace as well as customers. He was dealing with people that he would not normally meet at any other time. Two of the other crew members felt their communication skills were not developed greatly through interaction with customers because the procedure for dealing with customers was so circumscribed and if anything out of the ordinary happened they were supposed to call a manager. Tara said that crew members communicated with each other just as though they were friends. She added 'Or enemies. They fight, they do'.

Lisa said that in order to develop as a team worker, 'you watch what others do and you want to join in'. Tara thought that workers learned team work by being helped out and they would then help other newer people.

Relationships with managers seemed to be important. Peter said he treated them like teachers for a while 'but after a while they come down to your level a bit. On the first day they have total control over everything but it becomes more even'. Lisa was pleased that managers went out and 'had a smoke' with her; she felt that she had learned how to 'treat managers with respect but also be their friend'.

Tara noted that new workers could learn more by asking to be trained on more tasks. She thought managers would not expand a crew member's duties as a matter of course. It usually happened to workers who had shown promise from the beginning.

Advice to a hypothetical first-time worker indicated strategies which were felt to be successful:

Ask questions. Don't be shy to talk to staff. Be willing to learn in all areas; show an interest.

(George, manager)

Be confident but not over-confident. Smile and say 'Hi' when you walk in. Talk to people about everything, then you get friendly with people and they introduce you to other people. (Lisa, experienced crew member)

Being an active communicator was thus the most important thing a first-time worker could do.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

The treatment of first-time workers by some supervisors was believed by most participants to be a major impediment to the development of employability skills. John believed that it was managers' handling of pressure that created stress in the new workers. 'If the leader is stressed, the troops are stressed.' Peter's description of managers' behaviour at such times supported this.

It's probably the one thing that bothers me. It gets really busy around lunchtimes and dinner time and if management are shouting at you to do it quicker it gets on your nerves a bit. I think they're responsible for speed of service and things and they would get in trouble [if workers' speeds were slow]. But it gets to you if you try your hardest and you're under pressure to do things right while still doing them fast. One thing I find strange is the way managers start coming out and screaming at people out the back. When I was just a customer I always noticed how managers were the ones yelling at people and stuff, and now it's even more apparent.

Peter noted that 'the nature of the job is not really conducive to really liking it so if the managers are pushy then it gets worse. Things get said sometimes that shouldn't be said'.

The general consensus was that the tasks themselves were seen to be fairly monotonous and routine, and hence it was the working relationships which could make or break a store, and make or break a first-time worker's career with the company. Peter said that managers developed his skills well but were 'not so good at the personal things'. This statement was very similar to a statement by the national training manager, quoted earlier.

John acknowledged that it might take newly promoted managers three years to develop good management skills with first-time workers. The age bracket of most managers meant that they did not have experience with their own children in mind as they dealt with the teenage staff. Thus mistakes could be made and the culture and climate of a restaurant could be unpleasant. Moreover, assistant managers might not treat their young people as the restaurant manager might wish. For example, it was noted by one manager that some assistant managers expected unrealistic performance standards from first-time workers; and also that they spoke to them in inappropriate ways: 'The crew members feel stupid'. Hamburger House recognised these gaps in the training of new managers. The Crew management folder exhorted managers to:

Invest your time in building a quality team. This is the very best investment you can make!

John stated that the company was currently revising its induction and training practices with a view to reducing labour turnover. This was being done at the same time as the implementation of the new traineeship system. Managers would be carefully trained to treat young workers in an appropriate way. He thought that the managers who were best at dealing with full-time workers did so through empathy:

It helps if they can relate back to their own very first day on the job, and how they were treated, and then if it was a bad experience, do they want these young people to experience the same things.

The existing course on 'interpersonal relations' for managers discussed the working relationships within teams and how decisions, by managers and staff could impact on the work group. The company monitored very closely managers' relations with their crew. These measures, both existing and proposed, seemed likely to improve first-time workers' development of employability skills.

Peter thought that he would have appreciated more training. He was asked to do some tasks without watching others do them first. He found the buttons on the front counter keyboards hard to memorise and would have liked to have been given a template to take home and study before he stated work. It seemed likely that, with less anxiety about task performance, he would have been able to focus better on more generic skills.

Susan used incentive schemes extensively within her restaurant. Staff in teams or as individuals could get prizes for sales of certain items. She thought that with more resources she could offer incentives for new workers, for example, for those who learned most quickly.

With more resources she would work alongside the new workers for longer until they felt comfortable, since some new staff needed longer than others.

Based on his extensive experience with Hamburger House, John thought the following advice should be given to employers who had not employed first-time workers before:

- *Ask them to remember what it was like on their journey. They need to understand how people feel.*
- *Running a business involves us understanding them as well as the rules and regulations of the business.*
- *First-time workers are going through a period of transition. When we were 15 we weren't as reliable as adults would have liked us to be.*
- *In terms of skills, it is important to develop skills from the grass roots and you have a chance to get it right the first time.*
- *To reflect that these people are the future of our country, our businesses.*
- *How you treat them at that early stage can have a lasting impact on how well they experience life in the future, how they perform as a worker and even as a manager in the future.*

The crew members were asked how they would develop employability skills in first-time workers if they had their own business (they were asked to imagine a milk bar). Their responses indicated what they, as first-time workers, would have liked:

- *I'd make sure they got proper training for everything, how to deal with customers, what kind of things they sell so that if a customer asks they know, that they feel comfortable with their place in the company, make sure they feel appreciated.* (Peter, first-time worker)
- *Make sure they feel welcome and safe, and happy to come to work.* (Lisa, experienced crew member)
- *I wouldn't put them on when I was busy. I'd have someone extra to help them. I'd train them for a whole week first. I wouldn't hire them too young.* (Tara, experienced crew member)

None of the managers complained about deficiencies in the employability skills of their first-time workers, and there were no suggestions that schools should develop these skills more in young people. However, John did mention that he would like schools to give young people a broader view of learning. He thought that if it was explained to them that learning could take place outside classrooms they would have more appreciation of what they were learning in their jobs.

Conclusion

Hamburger House was an example of a company which relied heavily upon first-time workers and thus had developed strategies over a long period of time to integrate them into workteams and develop their employability. No complaints were made by managers about new workers' attributes: it was simply taken for granted that first-time workers needed a lot of development. It became clear that the success of a restaurant and the esteem in which its manager was held by the company depended to a large extent on the manager's ability to handle first-time workers and develop their employability skills. Thus managers received a great deal of training and support in this area and developed their own strategies for dealing with such workers. The technical skills involved in the work at Hamburger House were simple and routinised and thus soft skills training (for both crew members and managers) was of major significance.

However, the interviews revealed that successful integration into the Hamburger House workforce depended not only on what managers did, but also on what co-workers did. The experienced crew members, teenagers and recent first-time workers themselves, did not appear to be well-endowed with the interpersonal skills and qualities to assist newer workforce entrants in their passage into work. This factor was not mentioned specifically by management staff although may have been

implicit in branch managers' training. First-time workers who did not instantly fit in socially were likely to be 'frozen out' by the team.

The following were the major strategies observed within the workplace to aid the development of employability skills:

- Hire first-time workers in groups.
- Have the most senior manager induct them.
- Allocate carefully selected buddies to them.
- Give them an overview of the business and also of the workers.
- Allow them to learn a variety of tasks.
- Give responsibilities to new staff as soon as possible.
- Explicitly train branch managers and assistant managers in interpersonal skills.

The following were identified as helpful strategies for the young person to follow:

- Ask as many questions as possible.
- Initiate social conversations.
- Seek new tasks.
- Appear keen.
- Give priority to work above social engagements.
- Confide problems in manager.
- Enlist help of parents for difficult problems.

The following 'new' employability skills were identified from the case study:

- ability to integrate socially into a workgroup
- ability to adopt an appropriate attitude towards managers
- ability to articulate concerns and feelings.

Both of the restaurant managers and the national training manager appeared to gain a great deal of pleasure from their role in helping first-time workers settle into the workforce. As John said:

For a lot of these people it's their first-time job and as such that allows us to help them develop an understanding of the relationship between employer and employee, develop confidence in themselves and their ability to deal with other people. So there's a lot of real-life skills that come out of their interaction with us over and above the physical skills of learning to do a task.

Market-town City Council

Dawn Edwards

Introduction

Market-town City Council was a medium-sized local government organisation located in the southern part of New South Wales, supporting a city of some 60 000 people. The organisation provided an array of services to the local community and had at its command many primary and secondary industries. The Council had approximately 450 workers, only 12 of whom were aged under 18 (ten casual, one part-time and one full-time apprentice). There was a central human resource division and managers were employed to assist with running the various sections of the organisation.

Research method

Arrangements were made prior to the visit with the human resource manager; contact was then made with the manager of natural services (administration offices) and the maintenance supervisor (works depot) prior to conducting the interviews. Discussions were taped for transcription, and people were interviewed at two different locations—the Administration Offices and at the Works Depot.

Those people interviewed are shown in the following box.

Location	Persons interviewed	Length of service
Administration Offices	✧ Human resource manager	A number of years
	✧ Manager of natural services	Approximately 6 years
	✧ Environmental auditor officer (co-worker)	Commencing fifth year
	✧ Environmental health officer (novice worker)	Three years
Works Depot	✧ Maintenance supervisor	Approximately 10 years
	✧ third-year heavy vehicle apprentice (co-worker)	Third-year apprentice
	✧ first-year heavy vehicle apprentice (novice worker)	First-year apprentice

Findings

Why does the organisation recruit novice workers and how does it view them?

The human resources manager indicated that first-time workers were hired at the council as apprentices or trainees, and were given the opportunity to study for a qualification, gain experience and additional skills within the workforce and embark on a chosen career while at the same time earning money. The special attributes of the young school leavers they sought included being receptive to ideas and concepts, computer skills, and they needed to be keen. However, he also suggested that council had a preference for people with proven work experience and therefore only recruited about six novice workers at the most in a year, or around 2% of the annual intake, and this depended on what positions they had available at the time.

The skills required for trainees commencing at the Depot and those for Administration differed to some extent. In Administration the supervisor believed customer focus, commitment, good work ethic and adaptability were most important for the novice environmental health officer, although she felt work experience was more highly regarded, and the co-worker thought confidence, enthusiasm, communication and conflict resolution.

The supervisor and co-worker from the Depot considered practical skills and being able to think for themselves were most important for first-time workers. The trainee agreed, although he had a much larger list, which included good hand-eye co-ordination, interest in the job, mechanical mind, ability to work out problems, communication, being a good listener, understanding of concepts and experience on the job.

What processes are used in the company to develop employability skills in novice workers?

Processes such as a one-day induction program involving familiarisation of the organisation and meeting people and understanding their role in the organisation, were held at the beginning of their employment, and also work experience programs for students still at school were used by the organisation to develop employability skills in novice workers. The human resources manager indicated there were specific training programs that first-time workers were required to attend, covering the following:

- computer skills
- customer service skills (this covers communication)
- structured career day programs, interview skills (informal).

Some of these training programs were also available to other staff; for example, customer service skills course, which was also being reviewed to gain recognition within the VET system. There was also a follow-up held approximately eight weeks after the trainee commenced to ascertain if the job was meeting their expectation and to have a formal meeting with the trainee, the supervisor and the recruitment officer.

The environmental health officer was also given assistance to complete studies and achieve a degree in science and environmental health. This helped develop employability skills and gain additional skills. The supervisor felt that without the generic skills developed through tertiary education, this novice worker would not be able to compete at a competent level.

The co-worker also explained that various mentors helped; this included both supervisors and co-workers. The four staff members working indirectly with the newcomer went out of their way to ensure everything was going well, and helped her develop the skills needed to undertake the job competently and to deal with various people both internally and externally, as part of her job.

The novice environmental health officer confirmed these comments, and indicated that relevant staff members encouraged her to accompany them when carrying out field work, explained what they intended to do and why. After these visits, the processes and courses of action involved and other possible alternatives and outcomes achieved, were discussed with her. She was given greater responsibility over a period of time and now she generally carried out fieldwork visits herself. Relevant staff also helped her become familiar with the paperwork involved and particularly the legal aspect. She followed by example to begin with, but now used her own initiative to a large extent, seeking additional assistance when and as required.

The Works Depot maintenance supervisor felt that the initial induction (including input from the occupational health and safety co-ordinator), work experience, TAFE courses (training for a trade certificate) had all helped develop the employability skills of the apprentice. In addition, hands-on experience in workshop environment together with help from other workers and the previous apprentice helped in the development of both technical skills and developing employability attributes and skills such as self-esteem and communication skills. Because apprentices were always supervised, they gained confidence and learned what problems could occur and how to deal with them. The maintenance supervisor suggested that the amount of help given to apprentices varied 'depending on what you are working on. If you are working on a job that will take a week, they are given more details about the aspects of that job, if you are working on a job that will only take 5–30 minutes, then a quick run-down is given (what can go wrong, what might happen or look out for this)'.

The trainee pointed out that as he was always supervised, he had gradually gained confidence and an understanding of what was required. Safety measures had a high priority and were explained in detail. Also the usual expected problems were outlined and also how to address these. Other staff always made sure they knew that he understood the work that was being carried out. TAFE work could also be discussed with others, particularly with the third-year apprentice.

What do novice workers do themselves to develop their employability skills and how do they regard the development of these skills?

The human resources manager pointed out that now most first-time workers had already completed some work experience through school, or sometimes unpaid work after school, before commencing work at council, so these were initial steps toward developing these employability skills.

The environmental health officer confirmed that she had undertaken some previous work experience which was helpful and had given her a good understanding of some of the employability skills required. She felt that experience had already been gained dealing with a diverse range of people, she was keen and had improved her computer skills. She believed her communication skills and customer focus in particular, had been developed further through mentoring, watching others, help and instruction from her peers, and general experience, since commencing employment with the council.

At the Depot the trainee there indicated that skills, such as good hand-and-eye co-ordination, working through problems, communication and listening skills, and understanding of concepts had all been evident prior to commencing with the council but had been improved and further developed since starting work. According to the co-worker, many first-time workers now had some form of work experience before actually starting work—particularly some practical, hands-on experience (such as farm work), which helped with skills such as good hand–eye co-ordination, mechanical mind, and experience on the job. He had also completed a half-day course in communication but found that the real workplace experience was more beneficial for developing skills.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

In the area of environmental health, the supervisor considered that letter writing and also general writing skills should be included. Skills in researching law would also be useful. He believed that employers needed to develop these young people as an individual and as a professional—helping them gain all the skills needed in the area they worked in and were tested on through example, explanation and demonstration. He felt that one of the problems could be lack of credible supervisors who have no real customer focus. He said, 'if you want someone to have an outcome you have to put in place a number of steps and run them through the best examples you can in a nurturing environment'. The supervisor at the Depot agreed with this point of view, commenting that '80% of the time the measures put in place are good, but then 20% are bad and the first-time worker was put with the wrong person [as mentor] and learned the shortcuts that are bad—this can cause injury; hands-on is not always effective either because there is no formal recognition as a base of training'.

The manager of natural services said that the council conducted a one-day induction process followed by an induction in the specific section where the novice worker was to be employed. However, he raised the point that the main induction process may be better held a week after new employees commenced rather than on the first day, as he felt they may retain more information then.

The co-worker considered greater assistance from the government would be useful, perhaps as additional incentives (money is a real issue for training) for organisations to take on first-time workers. Trainees needed to be developed by organisations through mentoring, leading by example, or perhaps training programs, to help them gain the skills needed in the area where they were working. The trainee on the other hand, felt that additional work experience before leaving school was the best way to help develop employability skills, although she had also developed these skills further since coming to Market-town City Council (mainly through being shown what to do, and hands-on work).

At the Works Depot, the supervisor felt 'it would be better to introduce trainees to the real workplace, for example, actually working before they leave school—more than one week in Year 10, maybe one day a week'. The co-worker agreed that work experience before actually starting work was important since it helped both identify and develop employability skills. The trainee here made a very interesting comment: he knew other apprentices from TAFE who were given 'a hard time at their place of work' and actually hated work. When they made mistakes, they were continually reminded of these for months to come and were continually criticised with no encouragement given. He felt they needed productive criticism instead of being put down all the

time, which led to a lack of confidence. Employability skills could be better developed through constructive criticism.

The human resources manager believed the government should encourage small employers to hire trainees (with training available outside business hours for both the employer and trainee to attend). 'I think there needs to be more practical substance to some of the traineeship programs—it seems to be just surface.' He also believed measures could be more effective if more time were available—training programs do not last long enough. Some of the downsides of traineeships were discussed: he knew of a small employer who engaged three new people as trainees knowing only two were required, and later on fired one of these because of a medical problem which he was aware of at the time of selection and employment. He made the additional comment that:

I think there is too much reliance on the education system and employers, and I think nowadays parents are abnegating their responsibilities. I think it is an indictment on society where either the education system or the employment system has to teach basic manners and basic courtesies. The education system and parents need to be teaching real-life skills, money management skills and basic manners and courtesy.

Conclusion

- The first-time workers found it difficult to articulate how their employability skills had developed; they appeared to rely mainly on giving support to their employer's comments, although the trainee at the depot gave some interesting insight into problems some of his colleagues experienced at work (although he gave assurances that he did not experience this problem).
- There were a number of noticeable differences between the novice worker (environmental health officer) who had been with the council for some three years and the worker (Heavy Vehicle Apprenticeship) who was currently completing his first year. The person with three years' experience displayed confidence, was knowledgeable, had good customer skills, and was assertive.
- Formal induction processes were felt to be useful but perhaps needed to be staged.
- Council gave support and encouraged novice workers to develop their employability skills through making work experience available to school students as part of their studies, attending tertiary institutions, conducting courses on site and mentoring processes. The older apprentice/trainees also assisted the new employee. The organisation felt they would like to do more, and were in fact developing a set of procedures to conduct additional training in basic employability skills. The council would also like to give additional school students the opportunity to gain work experience.
- At the Administration Offices for the Market-town City Council, managers and co-workers believed that employability skills should be developed primarily by schools and the family, and that these employability skills needed to be improved. Those interviewed at the Depot did not necessarily agree. Generally these people seemed to feel that additional early exposure to workplace situations over a longer period of time was beneficial, also that parents could take a greater responsibility for real-life skills, money management skills, basic manners and courtesy. Most believed there was too much reliance on the education system and employers.

MEGT

Erica Smith

Introduction

This case study site was chosen because MEGT, as a large group training company[6] employed a large number of apprentices and trainees who had not worked before. The case study focussed only on young full-time workers because another case study was examining school-based apprentices and trainees. MEGT employed 770 apprentices and trainees in Melbourne, and 17 staff to manage them. In addition, there were small operations interstate. As well, MEGT had a Job Network employment placement operation located at the Melbourne site.

Two interviews were undertaken at the head office, and interviews were also carried out at two work sites, which acted as host employers for MEGT apprentices and trainees. Both were in the hospitality industry. These two workplaces were the catering department of Frankston Hospital, approximately one hour's drive from Melbourne, and a small conference centre, Bayview, in suburban Melbourne. At Frankston Hospital there were about 50 staff in the catering section, mainly female, and involved in serving food, but with some males among the dozen chefs who worked in the large open kitchen. They prepared meals for patients and for the hospital staff canteen, as well as for a number of nursing homes. There was only one first-year apprentice at the site. Bayview conference centre was a much smaller operation, with only five staff in the catering department, who performed all of the front-of-house and cooking duties between them, augmented for larger functions by casual staff. The five staff included one trainee and one apprentice.

Hospitality is a fast-moving and stressful environment. The MEGT field officer gave the following description:

In a busy kitchen things can be nice and streamlined, you get on and everything is fine, you've changed, washed your hands, you've got the radio on, chopping, you're doing bits and pieces. Then all of a sudden service time comes, the music has virtually gone off, people's tempers start to flare because the customers are coming in and the dockets and not enough has been done and you get screamed at.

Thus the environment into which the first-time workers had been placed was not easy, although it was acknowledged that the pressure was less in a hospital environment than in a commercial restaurant.

Research method

At MEGT's head office in outer suburban Melbourne, Jane, the senior manager in the group training company and Russell, one of the field workers, were interviewed. These interviews each lasted for approximately one hour. At each of the host employers the following interviews took place: apprentice or trainee; departmental manager; and a co-worker (at Frankston Hospital) and another manager (Bayview Conference Centre). These interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes and took place in privacy away from the workstation. All interviews were taped and transcribed for analysis.

6 Group training companies employ about one-fifth of Australia's apprentices and trainees, including around 50% of school-based apprentices and trainees. The group training company is the primary employer of the apprentices and trainees, who are located with host employers for their working hours, also receiving off-the-job training at or through TAFE or another registered training organisation.

Those interviewed are shown in the box below.

Name	Position	Special features
Jane	Industry employment manager, MEGT head office	Managed the group training company and the Job Network operation.
Russell	Industry employment consultant, MEGT head office	Managed the hospitality apprentices & trainees. Previous experience in nursing care and hospitality.
Geoff	Operations manager, support services, Frankston Hospital	Six years in job. Always been in hospitality.
Barbara	Chef, Frankston Hospital	Two-and-a-half years in job. Previous hospitality experience.
Wayne	Apprentice chef, Frankston Hospital (18)	Six months in job. No previous formal employment.
Richard	Catering manager, Bayview	Seven months in job. Extensive hospitality experience.
Frances	Conference manager, Bayview	14 months in job
Darren	Hospitality trainee, Bayview (18)	Three months in job. Previously worked in fast food and video hire outlet; Army reserves training.

On arrival at Bayview it was found that Darren had had considerable prior part-time working experience, so the interview with him included discussion of his experiences as a first-time worker in previous employment, and his experiences working alongside other first-time workers.

Findings

Why does the organisation recruit first-time workers and how does it view them?

MEGT was in the business of employing apprentices and trainees—that was how they were funded—and therefore many of its young workers were in their first job. The conversation with Russell indicated that he had a deep knowledge of the characteristics of this group of workers. Both Russell and Jane tended to focus on the more negative aspects of first-time workers, perhaps because they tended to deal with the problems rather than the successes, Jane in particular, as only serious problems came to her attention as the senior manager. Jane stated that one of their marketing strategies was to convince host employers that all the difficult aspects of the employment relationship would be taken care of by MEGT; as she put it '[they] don't have to deal with all those yukky issues'. Thus MEGT would monitor disciplinary matters and dismiss where necessary. Jane gave examples of two first-time workers employed by MEGT.

One had excessive periods of absenteeism and when the host employer did not want to employ her any more, MEGT took her on at the head office. The absenteeism continued:

We had a long talk with her and tried to focus on the need for reliability, the need for us to be able to give her a task and know that is actually happens, the need to know that she'd going to turn up in the morning. Since then she's had more days off than she did before. She's up to seven days in a row of not attending. I don't know how sick you would have to be, you'd have to be dying to take seven days off.

The other example was an apprentice who was three months into his job.

He refused to get the gear, the tools, out of the truck for the host employer because he didn't need to do that, that was the host employer's job, not his, he was not willing to be treated as a first-year apprentice.

The two host employer sites in the case study were both in the hospitality industry, where there was a tradition of employing apprentices, and it was notable that the managers and co-workers had a tolerant attitude towards first-time workers. At Frankston Hospital the apprentice was employed in a supernumerary capacity and there was thus little expectation that he would perform productive work. The motivation to employ him appeared to be entirely altruistic—to help a young person develop and to develop a skilled worker for the industry. At Bayview, the reduced cost of a trainee compared to an experienced worker appeared to have been a major motivation, along with the fact

that the level of work did not demand great skills or experience. Russell thought that most host employers who took first-time workers tended to prefer someone whom they could train: 'older people [are] set in their ways'. Also he believed that some chefs were young and would not like staff who were older and had more life experience than they did. The host employers clearly gained a lot of satisfaction from employing first-time workers and helping them develop. Frances said:

When you look back after six months at the same child, they're totally different, they've blossomed and they smile more often, and that's important too when they're dealing with people, they're less nervous.

Geoff made a similar type of statement about Wayne, his apprentice: 'he's growing into a young man now'.

The following box presents the views of both head office staff and host employer staff about first-time workers (direct quotes are in italics). It needs to be said that while the head office staff appeared to have a jaundiced view of new workers, in fact, during conversation they displayed an affection towards young people and a wish to assist them. On the other hand, they reported that over half the young people who sought employment through MEGT did not even get sent to host employers because their employability skills were so low, for example:

When you have a kid who comes in who slouches and chews and swears and those sort of things, well you would never put them forward to the host employer (Jane).

Name	Positive characteristics	Negative characteristics
Russell	You can train them	Can be unreliable and scatty
		Lack of career direction
		Sometimes just want to leave school
		Unrealistic expectation of the workplace
		Think they're mature but they aren't
		Get bored quickly
		Only want the money
		Often don't have a car so shifts in hospitality are a problem
Jane	Cheap to employ	Can be completely unaware of how to hold down a job
	Everything is a clean slate	Unreliable
	Have not picked up bad habits	Expect high-level work
	Have not been scarred by experiences with unpleasant bosses	Home issues often affect work unduly
Richard	Cheap	Need a lot of assistance
	Adaptable	
		Not used to pressure at school: *If you don't get it done today, well you've always got tomorrow*
Frances	Don't have bad habits	No experience, need showing how to do everything
	Can be enthusiastic	Shy
	Very happy to have a job	Lack awareness of importance of tasks
	It must be exciting for them to learn new skills	
Darren		Nervous
		The following three applied to other new workers he had observed:
		Lack of initiative
		Transport difficulties
		Unreliable
Geoff	Open eyes	Don't know how to accept responsibility
	Not limited	Can't multi-task

	Invigorate current staff by asking questions	Not used to structuring their day
		Poor communication skills
	Bring a sense of purpose to current staff	Don't know how to find a niche in a workteam
Barbara	Willing to have a go	No holistic understanding of the workplace and products *(something smells a bit funny and he hasn't picked up on that)*
	Willing to listen	
	Interested in the trade	Feel exposed
Wayne		Hard to cope with long day
		Difficult to talk to adults

Two areas of difficulty were discussed at some length by several participants. First was the effect of home life. Several participants referred to first-time workers they had known who had experienced boyfriend/girlfriend problems, dysfunctional families or drug and alcohol problems. As Jane put it, 'the wheels start to fall off'. These often impinged upon working life and could cause the young person to lose his or her job. Jane noted that drug problems in particular could very rarely be salvaged, although other difficulties could usually be worked around. On the other hand, a supportive family environment could be very positive. Russell described an apprentice who had moved to the city for an apprenticeship.

He relocated to Melbourne to do his apprenticeship and at first had nowhere to go, and accommodation was found and he went out 128% to fulfil all obligations and was totally dedicated and really got into it. His parents could see that he'd settled down immensely and then started to offer a lot more support, and because there was some government funding in the first year actually set him up into a little one-bedroom place, and they sort of kept an eye on him, and he just revelled in it.

Transport was a big problem, particularly in the hospitality industry. The younger first-time workers did not have cars and found early starts, late finishes and split shifts difficult. Parents were not always willing or able to drive the young people to work. For this reason among others, many employers preferred 18-year-olds to younger school leavers.

Several participants mentioned a lack in first-time workers of what was variously described as multi-tasking, awareness, and thinking laterally. This meant that although they might be able to carry out the task at hand, they could not see that it figured in a bigger picture and were not aware of its contribution to that picture. Two stories were told at Bayview about a previous first-time worker.

One of the boys put out the tea for the conference and there were only seven people [at the conference]; it was a very small one. The boxes of tea, there were six, were stored, so he got this out. And there were only two tea bags in the whole thing. So he didn't look to see if it was full, which is so silly and the people [clients] complained. (Frances)

If you gave this guy one task he could do it, that's what I've been told, if you gave him two things to do he couldn't do it. I was told once that he was told to go and stand by the coffee urn at one of our functions in the foyer; he did that and the people left and he still stood there, and he stood there for two hours until Richard opened the door and he was still standing there and he didn't clean up, he just stood there. (Darren)

While these might be extreme examples, the concept of being unaware of the point of the working activity and being unable to understand what really needed doing was mentioned several times. This attribute could be described as 'nous'.

What processes are used in the company to develop employability skills in first-time workers?

Strategies were in place both at the MEGT level and at the host employer level. At MEGT they liked to put first-time workers through a pre-employment course before they were formally employed. MEGT ran their own courses, for example, for retail and office administration work, which covered employability skills such as job-seeking, communication, team work and problem-

solving. However, the scheme under which these courses were funded had been restructured and it was unclear whether they could be continued. In addition, carpenters, for example, were required to undertake a TAFE pre-apprenticeship course, because employers in that trade did not want complete novices; and for some trades, testing was undertaken, for example, spatial awareness for horticulture. Once a young person got to the stage of being considered for employment by MEGT, the field officer discussed many employability issues with him or her, such as 'additional pieces of jewellery and methods of sitting and where you put your hands'.

Russell saw the most important employability skills as reliability, presentation, common sense, and motivation. Such skills were addressed in the initial full-day induction course which all MEGT apprentices and trainees were given before going out to workplaces. The course covered occupational health and safety but focussed mainly on helping the young people to function effectively in the workplace. This included training on how they could react if something was wrong, for example if there was something unsafe or illegal about the workplace.

Once in the workplace, the presence of a third party (that is, MEGT) was invaluable in helping the young people adapt to working life. Russell spent a great deal of time supporting and assisting first-time workers. He found that often changes in a workplace threw them, such as a chef leaving and a new one arriving. Russell was able to talk through these issues and explain to the first-time workers why they were feeling disheartened by such events.

I'd say: 'It's another learning curve. Just because you've learned it this way, and you're really good but your motivation has dropped because you're doing it another way now. But no, this is another way of doing things which is just as valid.' So when they start to grasp that, you can keep them motivated.

Host employer managers adopted a number of strategies to develop their young workers' employability skills. They regarded the most important skills as being time management, reliability, commitment, communication, team work, confidence, and a sense of humour. Strategies mentioned by the managers and by MEGT staff included:

- having the first-time worker complete a diary of the tasks he had undertaken each day, including the detail so that he/she understood what he/she was learning. This was designed to build on familiar activities from school
- questioning the young person
- being tolerant of mistakes and of constant questions
- understanding the young person and his/her personality
- becoming friends of the family where appropriate
- making regular appointments to discuss progress so that the young person could discuss any worries
- informally speaking to young worker each day
- having an 'open door'
- ensuring that enough variety was available in allocated tasks to keep interest
- progressively withdrawing supervision and support
- giving first-time workers details of next day's tasks to take home and study
- starting them in less stressed environments (for example, front of house) rather than pressured environment (for example, kitchen)
- taking them on visits to new environments, such as the vegetable or meat markets to open their eyes to the breadth of the industry
- showing confidence in them by allowing them to take charge of small events, for example, a coffee function: setting it up, clearing up, washing up, closing down and leaving. This took varying times with different workers.

Co-workers also played an important part. Jane said 'co-workers can make a kid's life a misery' and Russell thought that often a co-worker's own problems with the job or with management were taken out on junior staff. Geoff made sure that first-time workers were teamed up with chefs with certain characteristics. He described these characteristics as follows: they 'have good communication skills and have a high standard of work and are just proactive in the running of the department'.

There are certain chefs who have fantastic people skills and nurturing skills, and they have that sort of aura about them that makes somebody want to learn from them. Because their own expectations are high and because of the fact that they're a good communicator, they're the ones that I'd be teaming Wayne up with. (Geoff)

When asked to define what 'good nurturers' were, Geoff said:

They're very approachable. They don't mind the sharing of knowledge, a lot of people are very protective about knowledge, and they also enjoy the challenge of perhaps passing their skills on as well. So by nurturing, I mean sort of a mentor-type role … there are people out there who possess that and if you're switched on you can pick up on them straight away.

Richard thought that middle-aged women were the most caring co-workers. He said:

They are very accepting and very willing to share and help. Whereas the same age group with the men, it's more ruthless. They're always trying to outdo each other. Competition is good [but] for trying to accept new people in, it's a lot harder for them.

He observed these co-workers as willing to spend time talking, and during general conversation many tips about work were passed on. Male co-workers tended just to show how to do tasks whereas with women 'they can actually hear it verbally as well as see it'.

Frances saw these mature women, 'take them under their wing'. She noted however, that after a time, the first-time full-time workers would begin to behave more assertively towards the older women who were usually casual.

There was something happened that it turned over and they got everything together because then a trainee would start to be not exactly in charge but would be there and the casuals would clock on, and we could say confidently to the trainee, 'When the casual comes on at four o'clock could you ask him to clean out the cellar?'

Different trainees reached this 'turning over' point after varying lengths of service.

The co-workers thought that they were more likely to spend time with first-time workers and be more tolerant. Frances said she knew that if she did not pay them special attention:

They'd make a lot of mistakes, they'd get frustrated, angry, angry with themselves, angry with us because they're not instructed and shown how to do things properly. We'd get complaints from customers. And we just wouldn't do that, we can't throw someone in the deep end.

Barbara noted that the best co-workers were those who were enthusiastic, passionate about their jobs and had patience. She noted that a particular chef had taken Wayne under his wing, increasing his enthusiasm, 'so he's developed a sense of belonging or being part of a team, and so when you're more comfortable in a situation I think those qualities start to come out'.

Wayne himself, the first-time worker, referred to this chef and said that 'I had a good conversation with him and so he made me feel more comfortable around everyone else sort of as well'. Darren liked the fact that at Bayview there was no 'hierarchy' except in major decisions, and that the managers and senior workers showed the younger workers respect. The faith shown in him by Richard made him want to try harder. He also discussed an assistant manager at his previous job, in a fast-food outlet, who was expert at motivating the young workers by treating them as colleagues who all helped to get task done:

She was like 'Sure, do the job, and we'll all get out on time … if everyone works together we all get out quicker.' Whenever she was on … everything was also done properly and clean. She was working with you and not ordering

you around and then sitting down doing nothing herself. She would actually help out so it made it look like she knew what she was doing.

He noted that this assistant manager was particularly good with first-time workers:

She was more like their friends, got them laughing, got them to tell her stories about their day, and showed them the easy way to do things.

What do first-time workers do themselves to develop their employability skills?

It was clear that MEGT and host employer alike thought the first-time workers need to make good transport arrangements. While the host employers were tolerant of transport difficulties, their tolerance was limited. In a linked point it seemed agreed that young workers should make every effort to turn up to work every day as reliability was a key attribute. As Jane put it, 'maintaining their own outside-of-work life in a manner that allows them to be at work and functioning and useful while they're there'.

First impressions were very important. If first-time workers made mistakes early on, then, as Jane put it: 'They're behind the eight-ball because everyone perceives them in a particular way and then they have trouble getting around that perception'. Thus new workers needed to manage the initial impression so as not to lessen their chances of being given opportunities to develop themselves. Being a 'smarty' was often a problem; the balance between showing confidence but not over-confidence was not easy for first-time workers.

It was important for young people to talk to a manager or a field officer if there were problems. MEGT had one first-time worker who was subject to sexual abuse and it had taken many months before he confided in his field worker. Once the problem was uncovered the host employer dealt with the problem swiftly and correctly. Thus the induction training at MEGT encouraged the young people to speak up. More generally, communication skills were essential. Russell tried to coach the young people through difficult situations at work. If a young person felt a boss did not approve of him or her, it was best for the young person to approach the boss directly. This was hard for young people to do but was sometimes essential.

The following suggestions were made by participants as things that first-time workers could do. They should:

- Keep a notepad—a 'little Bible'—with notes about what to do at work. This seemed to be a common practice in the hospitality industry, which could be transposed to other industries.
- Ask if there was anything else they could do once they had finished a task.
- Ask to learn new skills.
- Ask questions if they were not sure about anything they had been told to do.
- Accept criticism as constructive not as a personal affront.
- Use humour with care (they should not attempt it without understanding the work team fairly well).
- Become aware of what was going on around them.
- Compare different methods of carrying out tasks; not accepting one person's version.
- Adapt conversation to the group they were in until they became an accepted part of the team.
- Produce their best effort at all times.
- Do not be afraid to try new things.
- Watch other people.
- Move quickly.
- Try to apply what they had learned at school (for example, in measuring).

- Show commitment rather than give the impression they were only there for the money.

As well as developing their employability skills per se, following these suggestions would help the first-time worker to become trusted and valued, and hence would lead to other staff devoting more attention to training and developing them.

Wayne mentioned twice during his interview that he would advise a new worker to 'stay quiet' and listen. It is unclear why he thought this, as his co-worker and manager both indicated they would welcome more conversation from him. It is possible that Wayne meant that a young worker's typical conversation (such as he would be used to in the school yard or out socially) would be inappropriate among older workers.

Darren thought that reliability was the paramount employability skill. He believed he had developed it during his time as a new worker at the fast-food outlet. He observed lack of reliability in another worker at his new workplace and in his previous job. For example in his previous job:

People wanted to get out on time and didn't care what they did so at first glance the kitchen looks clean and then you pull the flour out and it's all crusty and mouldy because it hasn't been changed, and the benches haven't been cleaned.

He then discussed an incident at Bayview where three staff were cleaning the kitchen and one staff member, Shane, kept disappearing. Shane kept sending messages saying he would return and do certain tasks, while the other boys worked overtime to complete other tasks.

Shane never came back, he didn't come back for the whole three-day weekend. On Tuesday when Richard walked in there was a bin filled with mouldy old food and the hot machines had been left on so they'd all burnt themselves out. Photographers were walking through taking pictures to show what Bayview was like and the kitchen was great and he walked in the scullery and nearly had a heart attack. It smelt that bad.

It was thus clear that the main message Darren would give to a first-time worker was 'be there and do what you say you will do'. He had become so disillusioned about others' reliability that he spoke disparagingly of team work because it meant having to trust other people.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

It was difficult to separate out employability skills from technical skills and also from personal characteristics. Jane reflected the views of several participants in that the employability skills and attributes were all linked to each other: 'you can't say you can have this but you really don't need that. They're all part of a person's character'.

She pointed out that even experienced mature and effective workers were sometimes unable to cope with certain situations and thus it was impossible for anyone, let alone first-time workers, to possess the complete list of skills and attributes. She felt that employability skills were complex and hard to pin down: 'Who knows what it is and who knows when you've achieved it and who knows how to train someone on, say, problem-solving'. She thought many host employers would view them as 'gobbledy-gook' and that it was difficult to suggest explicit strategies for developing them.

However, it was clear from the interviews at the host employers that there were certain features of workplaces which created barriers to the development of such skills, and certain activities which might encourage them, even if 'employability skills' as a term would not be utilised.

Barriers to the development of employability skills that were mentioned included:

- a lack of attention to training
- lack of time
- co-workers who were obstructive and unforgiving
- co-workers who were not welcoming
- employers who treated first-time workers as cheap labour ('employer sharks')

- a workplace where someone was constantly on show (such as a kitchen)
- a workplace where people have a long history of working together; as Geoff put it 'a whole ethos built around personalities'.

Additional strategies suggested by participants included the following pieces of advice to an employer:

- Setting a good example to the first-time workers. 'You can't expect the trainee to turn up on time every day if they're the only person who does. This is one of the harder things because people tend to be more critical of other staff rather than of themselves.' (Jane)
- Providing scaffolding to the first-time workers so they can see where what he/she is learning currently fits into the total learning experience. (Jane)
- Make sure the supervisor works closely by the young people so that it is easy to ask questions. (Jane, Darren)
- Meet the expectation about technical training so they do not feel short-changed. (Jane)
- Encourage the discussion and application of off-the-job training because there are employability skills mixed up with the technical training. (Jane, Richard)
- Think of the first-time workers as part of the manager's daily routine. (Geoff)
- Set specific learning tasks unconnected with the daily work, for example, trying a new recipe, and discussing the results. (Geoff)
- Administer tests every so often to see what they are retaining. (Richard)
- Tell them you know that everyone makes mistakes. (Darren)
- If problems in performance surface, address them quickly.
- Never assume anything. Expect the unexpected! (Richard)
- It was also suggested that prior work experience, either paid or unpaid, before entering the full-time workforce would be helpful. It would increase confidence and give people basic workplace communication skills, even if the technical skills were not directly transferable.
- Encourage all staff to show an interest in first-time workers. Make them feel welcome. (Jane, Wayne)
- Don't push them too hard at first and after a while just get them to work harder. (Wayne)
- Give first-time workers an overview of the whole workplace, spending up to a week on this induction. (Barbara)
- Encourage questioning and tell them they will not look silly by asking questions. (Barbara)
- Watch the tone of voice in which feedback is given: 'Perhaps some of us use grumpier voices than others'. (Barbara)

The adult participants were asked where they had gained the skills they had in working with first-time workers. Some referred to experience as parents, but other life experiences were also felt to be useful. These included teaching in schools, training in industry, being a nurse and managing a children's home. Russell said he made a conscious effort to keep up to date with trends in youth culture, such as music.

Once they see you're not a stick in the mud then they will come to you. And that's what I say to them 'No matter what, even if it's to do with drugs or anything like that, we are here to assist you, and it is confidential.' (Russell)

Conclusion

This case study produced a great deal of useful information as it combined the experience of staff in a group training company with that of long-term workers in the hospitality industry. It was clear that many young people experienced some difficulties in fitting into working life. They came

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without many employability skills and sometimes did not develop such skills through their employment without a great deal of assistance. The presence of the third party, the group training company, was very useful in such cases. In addition, support from parents and a stable home life were important, as were pre-employment courses. Group training company field officers with their wide experience both of young people and of a huge range of workplaces, were able to offer valuable advice to first-time workers, both before starting work and while they were at work. However, young people did not always understand or utilise the degree of support available to them.

A huge range of strategies were discussed for helping young people develop employability skills through work. The following list summarises what seemed to be the most often mentioned and most important:

- Formal inductions are useful.
- Conduct regular timetabled discussions.
- Allocate first-time workers to a sympathetic and enthusiastic mentor.
- Widen the young person's understanding of the business and the industry.
- Pay attention to adolescent issues.
- Show confidence.
- Progressively withdraw supervision.
- Pay attention to technical training.
- Set a good example.

To maximise their development of employability skills, the following strategies seemed most important for young people:

- Manage first impressions.
- Attend work every day.
- Confide in a responsible adult if there are difficulties.
- Ask to do extra work and to learn extra things.
- Make the most of criticism and feedback.
- Accept that fitting into a workgroup is not a speedy process.
- Observe the total operation of the business.
- Always do what you say you will, when you say you will.

The following employability skills not mentioned in the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry list emerged:

- multi-tasking, lateral thinking, 'nous' (not quite the same as 'initiative')
- understanding the business, the big picture
- utilising support mechanisms at home and in other organisations
- addressing difficulties at work.

Portside Group Training SA (Indigenous case study)

Sue Erickson

Introduction

Portside Group Training was the largest employer of apprentices and trainees in South Australia. The head office was located in Blyth, in South Australia's mid-north. Branch offices were located in Port Adelaide, Elizabeth, Berri, Port Pirie and Murray Bridge.

Portside employed and indentured young people who were placed with host employers in private industry. Portside had a deliberate policy of employing Indigenous people and generally 10% of Portside apprentices and trainees were Indigenous. They currently employed 35 Indigenous employees; numbers had been as high as 50. This case study focussed on two young Indigenous workers, one who had just completed a Business Administration Traineeship and the other who was studying a Horticultural Apprenticeship. Both were working for host employers—the former with Kaylene Krantz and Associates, a registered training organisation training in the areas of community services and sport and recreation, and the latter with the Playford Council in the parks management area.

In fact, 80% of the Indigenous apprentices and trainees were male and 20% were female. Recruitment was a complex and time-consuming process. Portside used the Job Network providers to identify potential recruits; they also advertised on the touch screens over the internet. Unfortunately the Job Network providers had only a few young Aboriginal school leavers on their books. In the end Portside used its networks and asked other registered training organisations to identify suitable employees. Portside also recruited through Turkindi, the Indigenous Information Network Association of South Australia, and where possible, from other sources.

Research method

Interviews were held with the following personnel using a tape recorder. Interviews were subsequently transcribed and written up.

Position	Role, duties
Field officer, Portside Group Training Adelaide	Supervision of apprentices and trainees, initially matching young people with the host employer, liaison between host employer, young person and RTO, monitoring young people's training and employment
Kaylene Krantz & Associates (RTO), specialising in community services training, sport and recreation training	Employment of business administration trainee
Business administration trainee, 20 years of age (male)	Reception duties, setting up systems for inventory and stores control, managing student record and arranging interviews
Horticultural apprentice, 23 years of age (male), returning to the Playford Council to complete an apprenticeship	Part of parks management team
Manager, Open Space Business Unit, City of Playford Council	Maintaining a proportion of council's parks responsibilities (verge mowing, road sweeping, tractor slashing etc.), overseeing teams of full-time contract staff, apprentices and seasonal temporary staff (currently managing three Indigenous employees)

Note: RTO=registered training organisation

Findings

Why does the organisation recruit novice workers and how does it view them?

Portside Group Training

Portside's recruitment was based on funding programs available. For example, on occasions funding would be available for specific Indigenous programs. In these cases none of the places would be allocated to young school leavers, because older Indigenous people had been targeted. On other occasions, Portside organised mass recruitment drives for Indigenous people who held a car licence or light truck licence. Age was irrelevant.

When Portside took on apprentices and trainees, they were generally young school leavers. According to the field officer, when matching up trainee and host employer, Portside required the young person to possess many of the employability skills. He commented that:

Most of the kids we take on have the qualities we want. We don't want to take on trouble. Schools will phone up asking us to take on kids that want to get out of school and are causing trouble. Often, if they are causing trouble at school, they will cause trouble in the workplace. We're not interested in them. We carefully look at CVs, do interviews and conduct background checks. Sometimes, we know the family.

Portside was interested in young people who had learnt extra skills while at school and had demonstrated motivation. They looked at education levels and attendance levels. They tried to assess whether the trainee would turn up for work every day. School reports indicated pattern of attendance and whether they turned up for interviews on time or arrived at training courses on time.

The field officer also suggested that it helped if you knew where potential young workers lived and whether parental support was available. He was interested in whether they had showed initiative or had a particular interest and had undertaken additional activities, such as an engineering pathway or a pre-trades course. On many occasions Portside selected them up from these courses.

The field officer remarked that many people had unfortunate preconceptions about the work ethic of Indigenous people. Employers look for hard workers and particularly in the trades, they look for people with good hand skills. Often Indigenous young workers had undertaken such a trades-related course while at school. Portside was keen to identify young people who were motivated and enthusiastic with an 'I want to go somewhere in my life' attitude. Furthermore, it was important for the young trainees and apprentices to be adaptable because they could be working anywhere at any time.

In some instances family relationships exerted pressure on novice workers: they had to learn to balance work and home.

Kaylene Krantz & Associates

The manager of this registered training organisation made the deliberate decision to recruit an employee who would have found it difficult to get a job under normal circumstances. She wanted a male employee, and because the registered training organisation was conducting traineeships, she felt that she would like the company to take on a trainee to enable her to 'put her money where her mouth was'. Portside arranged for the young Indigenous male to come to an interview and he was selected for the position.

The manager of Kaylene Krantz and Associates identified additional incentives for recruiting a young trainee: if the employment turned out to be unsatisfactory, she did not have to dismiss him since he was hired through a group training company. Furthermore, because he was Indigenous she received additional funding. And finally, the manager noted that she believed that she had a moral

obligation to employ young people. As for the staff at the registered training organisation—they enjoyed his youthful energy and appreciated his fresh ideas and approach to work issues.

Playford Council

The council had a committed policy of providing employment opportunities to the community and also offering the local Indigenous people a chance to get a job. The manager commented that because of the additional funding available for employing Indigenous workers, it also provided an opportunity to employ staff more cheaply.

Having young workers participating in the work teams was extremely beneficial, the manager perceiving this as an opportunity for an inflow of new and up-to-date information. These apprentices were studying and had access to the latest material and resources in their horticulture certificates and were in a position to impart new knowledge to other older workers in the team. Moreover, they could often identify a more effective way of doing things. The manager believed that it was rewarding to have a team comprising a mix of ages. The diversity was enriching and the healthy debate that occurred between age groups was a bonus to the team. He considered that any failings the apprentices had were attributable to their being young.

What processes are used in the company to develop employability skills in novice workers?

Portside Group Training

When recruiting at Portside, interviews were undertaken and a range of tests utilised to select employees. Once employed, the field officer went through an induction training package which covered occupational health and safety and contained the paperwork necessary for signing up the new employees. Included in this package was information regarding Portside's employment expectations and work performance. Work performance covered attributes such as co-operation, reliability, initiative, consistency of effort, punctuality and effect on peers. During the induction process the requirement for reliability was discussed. However, the field officer believed that reliability couldn't be taught: 'if they're not going to be reliable, you can't train them. You can't train a kid to get out of bed at 6 o'clock in the morning'.

The field officer considered that the larger projects enabled young workers to learn employability skills. In a work situation such as the construction of Adelaide's Southern Expressway for example, where there were 15 Indigenous employees, it was possible to teach both work skills and impart a work ethic.

When Portside was attempting to match an individual to a host employer, they tried to recruit the best employees, those who already had many of the employability skills. Once they were employed, the field officer conducted spot checks and had discussions with host employers about the young worker and their skills. The host employer was asked to use the apprentice trainee handbook and rate the apprentice or trainee on their work attributes and work performance. This information formed the basis for discussion between the field officer, the host employer and the young worker about the need to maintain or improve these skills. The field officer noted that, when he visited employees at their individual workplaces, he always encouraged the young workers to be enthusiastic and motivated.

Kaylene Krantz and Associates

The manager of this registered training organisation remarked that she believed she had a responsibility to nurture the new employee, commenting that she could remember 'the ups and downs, the pain and the passion of youth', so she had a great deal of empathy for young people. She felt that we should all look back and remember how we were at that age, describing her view of training for young people:

This person is this age, therefore the life experience is this much, so it is my responsibility to guide and direct and talk about appropriateness and inappropriateness and mentor change without curbing exuberance.

While supervisors can be trained and qualified in many skills and in many areas, the manager of the registered training organisation firmly believed that, for training to be successful, trainers and supervisors must recognise the need for a 'corporate heart'. 'People have to open their hearts to other people's feelings and be allowed to recognise their own.' Most of the staff at the registered training organisation had the same philosophy, largely attributable to their belief in the value of holistic training with a view to empowering people to reach their full potential. The manager said that she believed that novice workers wanted to be guided, directed and developed.

During his first year undertaking the Business Administration Traineeship at this registered training organisation, the trainee was mentored by a 26-year-old co-worker who herself was studying for the Certificate IV in Frontline Management. The manager considered it important that he had only one person he was responsible to and who taught him new skills and guided him in a one-to-one context. The trainee benefited by only having one person to answer to, a less intimidating situation. Furthermore, giving the mentor this responsibility empowered her and enhanced her skills. She was also closer in age to him than the other workers. If staff had a problem with the trainee they had to approach his mentor in the first instance and work out a solution with her. Meanwhile, the manager kept an overall check on things.

The manager noted that it was the employer's role to help to develop new skills and maintain an environment that would encourage employability skills, such as loyalty, commitment and honesty; it was also the employer's responsibility to assist the young employee to maintain enthusiasm for the job and to ensure that the young worker continued developing self-esteem. When asked how the company developed these employability skills, the manager replied: 'I don't know how we do it, it's observation and being sensitive to energies and moods and listening and looking and being aware of any changes'. She claimed that supporting trainees and making them part of the team was crucial to the development of these skills. She also believed that it was the mentor's role to identify problems and to offer assistance and advice. With young people, mental health was always an issue; it was important to be aware of where a young person was coming from.

New staff were taken through an induction process. The employment expectations were explained and the manager asked the new employee if they thought that they would be able to meet the requirements. If, once they were into their training, their performance began to deteriorate, the staff would endeavour to solve any issues: was the employee unhappy and was this because they had been given too much work? If, for example, they were continuously late, the manager or mentor would show concern. They would never say: 'you're late!'. It was important that the new worker felt part of the team and that their fellow workers cared. She has found, however, that you cannot teach common sense: trainees either have it or they don't!

Playford Council

New recruits were given a one-day induction course which the manager confirmed was most important for them: if the new employee missed this course, 'they had a lot of catching up to do'. New employees were also supplied with an accompanying guide which covered what the job entailed and its concomitant responsibilities. The induction also covered an introduction to occupational health and safety. During the induction program new employees were introduced to other staff members in an attempt to remove, from the outset, barriers to open and relaxed communication. The manager explained that he had found these initial introductions helpful since some of the Indigenous apprentices were shy. At this time also the jobs of all employees were explained to the new recruits.

The manager did not expect the new apprentices, Indigenous or otherwise, to possess many employability skills. He believed the induction was the beginning of developing their skills. It was his job to make sure the person in charge of training had a reasonable approach and acted as a

mentor while teaching new skills. When the apprentice was in the early part of his apprenticeship, he always worked with a more senior worker. The training was conducted on the job.

The council developed employability skills by mentoring and reminding the young person about aspects of the job. It had to be delivered in a way that did not affect self-esteem. As in the preceding instance, employers were expected to remember their own youth: the difficulties associated with balancing friends and fun with work requirements. It reduced instances of failure if the young people received good mentoring and leadership.

As the horticultural apprentice became more skilled, he was able to complete tasks without being supervised. It was council practice to establish work teams, since working in teams gave all the staff—including the young Indigenous apprentices—an opportunity to have a say in how the job should be done. The leader of each team tried to develop the skills of the young worker by demonstrating how things were done. If the manager worked with the group, he would demonstrate styles and drop hints rather than saying that the apprentice was doing it incorrectly. He did not want anyone to feel uncomfortable and wanted to get the best from everyone. He believed that if the apprentice was making mistakes, then he or the trainer should check to ensure that they were delivering the message in an accessible and comprehensible manner. The manager also initiated a program whereby apprentices would undertake work in the office since it gave them an overview of the job and it helped to reduce his work load. He gave them jobs that made sense, nothing meaningless. For example, he might ask them to check the customer feedback system on the computer, look at a complaint, meet the customer, find out what the concern was, discuss the issue and allocate a work team. This helped the apprentices to understand the beginning of the process they were involved in. When they were out in the field, they hated the paperwork. Understanding the process made it more meaningful.

What do novice workers do then to develop their employability skills and how do they regard the development of these skills?

The business administration trainee claimed he already had a few of these skills. Working in his current traineeship he was able to fine-tune them. Initially, he did this by watching others or being told. Now, he had begun to challenge and change the ways things were done. He often saw a better way to do things. He became more committed as time went by. He said that when people gave you help, trusted you and challenged you, then you enjoyed the work and became more loyal. When times were busy and people expected too much, he had to learn to deal with stress. He found it paid to have a sense of humour.

His host employer, the registered training organisation, had given him extra responsibilities and he had developed new skills by accepting the challenges. He had learned to plan and organise, communicate more effectively, and extend his problem-solving skills. He had achieved his certificate III and had been offered the opportunity to study for a certificate IV. While studying, he had used and developed these skills. He thought that, in his first job straight out of school, he had done really well.

Since returning to complete his apprenticeship, the horticultural apprentice noted that the council had restructured its open space maintenance unit to work in teams. He said he enjoyed this structure more because it gave him a chance to co-operate with his team mates and to use his skills. He liked the community feel of working for the council; it resembled an extended family. He felt that he had adopted the area and had to look after it. He also commented that it helped that there were other Indigenous people there and the people were more 'politically correct about how they go about things now' and were not as likely to offend culturally. He enjoyed the job because he kept busy and he now felt that he had a promising future. Since he obtained his apprenticeship he believed that all of his employability skills had improved—everything had improved because he had a future.

The apprentice had been given the opportunity recently to shadow the manager and develop communication, problem-solving and planning and organising skills. He and his fellow team members, since the restructuring, had been involved in team-building exercises and communication development which was organised through TAFE. The horticultural apprentice believed that his skills had certainly improved—with the help of the manager and other young employees. They had all connected, working as a group, and he had learned from others and from observation.

He considered he was now more mature and not such a rebel. He now drew upon his own youthful experience when he saw others misbehaving and attempted to point them in the right direction. He felt that school had not prepared him for work at all. 'Out of what they could do, they sort of dance around the issue a bit. They did miserably at it, didn't touch upon it.' However, he thought that the one week of work experience which had been part of his schooling had been a useful exercise. The horticultural apprentice had learnt a lot from his short experiences in other work, especially initiative and enterprise skills, and used a number of the employability skills and attributes when he had decided to return to the council and complete his apprenticeship.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

The Portside field officer said that the provision of work experience and pathways courses would certainly help to improve employability skills. They assisted young people to learn what was expected of them in the workplace. Learning about work, visiting to a range of different workplaces while at school, and learning about the different expectations of employers could only be beneficial to the development of these skills.

The business administration trainee suggested motivating young workers by giving them responsibility. Young people enjoyed responsibility and learnt from the challenges.

The council suggested that offering opportunities to enable young people to shadow those in leadership positions and in customer service roles, would help to develop these skills. Placing young workers in different parts of the unit would enable them to see the big picture and have a better understanding of the entire process and was another way in which employability skills could be redeveloped.

Are there differences between the employability skills required by, and developed in, part-time student jobs and full-time jobs?

The young trainee believed there was a significant difference. In his part-time night-fill job, his employer did not require a lot from him and did not try to develop him as a person. Nevertheless, he claimed that the job had helped him to understand personal presentation, because he had to wear a uniform. As a result of this job he had also become more reliable because, as he put it, if you turned up late, you did not get a shift the following week. Overall, he felt exploited in this job; he was just a cheap labour source. He didn't feel that he had developed or improved any of the employability skills while in this part-time job.

The registered training organisation had only had one work-experience person in the past and did not feel there was enough work to keep them busy. So they were unable to comment. The council had very few part-time student workers. Occasionally, they had work-experience students but they were restricted to where they could be located in the workplace.

Conclusion

In relation to the Portside Group Training Company, the following features relating to employability skills in novice workers emerged:

- Portside trained young people in employability skills but tried to select employees who already possessed a number of these skills.
- All apprentices and trainees attended induction programs.

- During their indenture with their host employers the field officer checked on the young Indigenous employees and monitored their work performance vis-a-vis their employability skills, and provided any necessary support.

In the context of the two host employers, the registered training organisation and the local government council, and in relation to employability skills in novice workers, the host employers:

- actively trained the young workers in employability skills
- enjoyed the youthful and new approach that the trainee and apprentice brought to the workplace
- did not expect the novice workers to have many, if any, employability skills
- had a formal induction process which specified the expectations of their workplace
- were aware of the financial benefits to their business of hosting an Indigenous trainee or apprentice
- placed the less experienced worker with the more skilled workers. The council apprentice worked with others in teams. The registered training organisation trainee had one person looking after him, a mentor.

Sound Fits

Erica Smith

Introduction

Sound Fits was a small business which installed and maintained sound equipment, including car audio systems, and computer equipment. It was run by two young business partners, Pete and George; Pete held a controlling share in the business but most decisions were taken jointly. The company had been in operation for three years at the time of the case study, and George had joined after 18 months, bringing the computer business with him. Brendan, the apprentice, had begun working at 15 years of age about eight months prior to the interviews. He had spent a week with the company on work experience earlier in the year. His only previous working experience had been helping a cousin who had an internet mail-order electronics components business.

Casual staff were also hired from time to time to cover peaks in business and the absence of Brendan on block release at the local TAFE college. The partners were considering hiring another young person, possibly a trainee or another apprentice.

The business was situated in a unit in a small industrial estate in Wagga. It consisted of a small customer reception office, a large workshop littered with cars and pieces of equipment, and an upstairs area used for storage and including the managers' office.

Research method

Pete, George and Brendan were each interviewed during July 2002 for between 30 and 45 minutes during normal working hours. Interviews took place in privacy in the managers' office. The first two interviews, which were taped and transcribed, took place on one day, and the third interview on a separate day about two weeks later. The interview with Brendan was not taped.

Findings

Why does the organisation recruit first-time workers and how does it view them?

Pete's view of first-time workers was based not only on his experience with Brendan but also on his previous job as a manager in a car audio company (where he likened the management of the different personalities involved to 'running a playgroup'). George had previously managed work-

experience students. Their view of school leavers was that they were eager and keen to learn, they were impressionable and they did not bring bad habits with them. The more negative aspects of first-time workers were that they were lacking in confidence, unwilling to make decisions, 'a bit scared of the whole thing, overwhelmed by the whole working thing' (George) and found it hard to cope with a full working day. Pete said, 'He was set on a 3.30 timetable; at 3.30 he basically stopped'. And George put it this way: 'He slowed down at about three o'clock; his brain shut down'.

Moreover, Pete felt that school students were used to being told what to do all the time: 'Now it's history and then it's going to be English' and hence had little initiative. In a similar vein, Brendan did not always see a job through to completion. As a first-time worker, Brendan also seemed to dislike doing the more mundane jobs such as cleaning windows or sweeping. He did not perhaps recognise that all these tasks were part of the business. Pete told the following story:

We had a quiet day and I was getting on with paperwork and I told him to clean the windows. He said, 'It's not my job'. I said 'You're employed by me and yes, it is part of your job'. He said, 'I'm not going to learn anything by it'. I said, 'Yes you are, you're going to learn how to clean windows and to do as you're told'.

Because Brendan, as a very young worker, did not have a driver's licence he could not get himself to work except in the summer when he could use his bicycle. He was therefore reliant upon others to drive him, as there was no suitable public transport. Sometimes he was late in the mornings, as he had to wait for his mother to get ready to go to work. At other times he had a lift home with a friend and sometimes the friend arrived when Brendan was in the middle of a task. Brendan would then leave his task to take his lift, which was noted by Pete. Interestingly, Brendan himself believed that he was usually early for work.

The reason why a school leaver was recruited was that the company needed 'an extra pair of hands'. On jobs where two workers were needed it was inefficient for the other partner to stop his specialist task to give assistance to the other partner. Hence an apprentice at a low rate of pay was ideal. The partners each showed commitment to the concept of inducting a young person in the trade, George in particular, as he had been an electronics apprentice himself only recently. Sometimes the exigencies of the business ate into training time; as Pete said:

Being a small business, it's a trade-off between getting him trained, getting him a trade and running our business.

Pete mentioned that car audio technicians were in high demand in the labour market and that if Brendan were successful he would be highly marketable.

What processes are used in the company to develop employability skills in first-time workers?

While the partners' view was that there were no specific strategies in place to develop Brendan as a first-time worker, there were several processes in place which appeared to help Brendan settle in and become an employable worker. Perhaps the most important was that both managers had high levels of tolerance for Brendan as a new worker. They each used phrases such as 'he's only 16' and 'it's to do with being young'. Pete thought that young people tested boundaries at work just as they did 'with parents, friends and the law'. They were tolerant of mistakes. Pete gave the following example:

We had an incident last week where he scratched the back of a customer's car and we had to get it re-buffed, so we didn't make any money on the job. At the time I was a little bit cranky. I sat down and explained how he had to be careful and how dark cars showed marks more than others. As long as it doesn't happen again it's fine; it's not as though he's going to get an official warning or anything.

Their recognition of the difficulty of the transition from school to work included being fairly generous with lunch and tea breaks, and allowing Brendan time off when he needed it.

Pete adopted the strategy of fairly close supervision and the cultivation of respect. He said that he'd 'been trained to keep on top of them (new workers)'. Brendan noted that the managers gave him jobs, which were 'suitable' for him, that is, at an appropriate level of difficulty. Pete was teaching Brendan how to prioritise things, and a part of this was understanding which jobs were more important to the business. For example, the higher earning jobs needed to be done before the lower earning jobs.

Brendan was introduced to a broad range of tasks, to avoid, as Pete put it, a fear that 'he would be loading Windows 98 onto computers all the time'. Pete said:

Whenever there's something that's a little bit different we make a point of taking Brendan with us. It keeps them more interested and when they come back to the more mundane things they tend to stick with it because they know they're not going to be doing it all the time. [However] there's some things that are boring and are repetitive and that's part of work.

Brendan's problem-solving skills were interpreted by the participants as relating to fault diagnosis and the speed of removal of audio equipment from cars. Brendan appeared to have improved these skills through observation of how Pete did such tasks. Pete said that he could 'let him go now. He can do anything from a BMW to an old Holden'. Pete said that he did not specifically teach problem-solving skills; he thought that part of fixing things is to have problem-solving skills. It's the same on a computer. That's a real cross-over point between the personal ability of problem-solving and actually getting the electronic job done.

Pete believed that some employability skills were inherent; for example, Brendan had good communication skills to start with. He believed this to be a family trait since he knew Brendan's siblings. Brendan also had teamwork skills and confidence before starting work, which were assumed to have developed through sport and through Scouts. George however had noted an improvement in Brendan's communication skills.

With regular customers now he'll stop and have a bit of a chat with them whereas at first he would shy away from it.

George said that they had explained how Brendan should speak to customers and had showed him how to take notes.

Showing that the first-time worker was trusted was an important strategy. Brendan was appreciative of the fact that his managers let him handle money and allowed him to remain in charge of the workshop when they were both out. The managers also let him into their personal lives to an extent. For example, Brendan had assisted one with his other business and had also helped one of the managers move house. These all added to his sense of belonging and being valued. In a closely associated point, showing confidence was also important. Thus Pete, for instance, had stopped checking Brendan's work, on straightforward tasks, after about six months.

On occasions Brendan became too cocky and then he needed to be 'knock[ed] down'. This was done by 'put[ting] him back in his box—a slight comment on the side or just send him back to work'. The use of humour seemed to be important in such situations. Pete said 'I often tell him, he whinges a lot for a little person'.

Pete thought that some skills were slower to develop than others. For example, he said:

His self-initiative is a little bit slow. He is still a bit worried about doing things wrong; he would prefer to wait rather than get it wrong, where I don't mind if he mucks it up as long as he doesn't do it twice.

Other skills or attributes were not very important in this job; for example, personal presentation was not of paramount importance as long as Brendan was clean and tidy, because most of the work was 'behind the scenes'.

An important additional skill was the ability to use appropriate terminology. It was not until Brendan was able to utilise industry 'jargon' that the managers were able to talk him through jobs

over the phone. Brendan's mastery of this skill was important because it meant that he could finish jobs on his own without wasting time waiting for Pete or George to return.

It seemed difficult to articulate how some of the skills and attitudes were developed. In relation to loyalty, Pete said:

Brendan knows because we discuss figures and things and he will be in the room, and he knows not to discuss quotes and so on.

It was not, however, obvious how Brendan 'knew' these things.

The managers took their role as Brendan's first-time employers seriously. Pete said 'With any luck what we teach him now is going to stay with him'. Brendan was clearly appreciative of the strategies that had been used, as when asked what he would do to settle in new employees if he had his own business, he said 'Make them feel welcome, accept them. Give them a chance—help them along.'

What do first-time workers do themselves to develop their employability skills?

Brendan considered loyalty, trustworthiness and commitment to be an important bundle of attributes. He felt he had developed these because he 'wanted to be all these things, to make my bosses happy'. He had remembered Pete's stories about theft at a former workplace and was sure that he would never be like that. His self-esteem had been developed since starting work partly by the mere fact of being a worker. Firstly, it had been boosted because he had won the job; secondly, he had more money and hence could go out more and meet new people. His parents had 'eased up' in their supervision, allowing him to experience new activities. And at TAFE he met different types of people, improving his communication skills.

Brendan believed that talking to co-workers was an important strategy to help settle in to a job. He recounted a story about a work experience student who had not done this:

We had a work experience boy once and he didn't say anything. You didn't know what he was thinking. We couldn't have a working relationship so we just gave him a load of speakers to wire up.

Brendan's advice to a hypothetical first-time worker was as follows:

Go in there with confidence; work hard and get in early to work. If you make any mistakes just keep on going. Build a good relationship with your boss.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

Several points were emphasised by the participants. The managers saw tolerance as a most important attitude of employers of first-time workers. George advised 'easing them into it'. He felt that some sort of pre-employment course for the first-time worker might be helpful. This would help to improve communication skills, familiarise young people with an industry area, and move them from a school routine and into a work routine. He felt that TAFE day release (although not pre-employment) helped apprentices to make the adjustment.

George mentioned the need for employers to examine and tighten up their own working practices. In his own cases he knew he did not keep the work area tidy enough. He felt he had picked up this bad habit from his former manager. So his advice to employers of first-time workers was:

Make sure you get rid of your own bad habits so you don't give a bad example to them. They'll have enough of their own bad habits.

The two managers got their knowledge about how to treat first-time workers by different means. In Pete's case he based his actions mainly on his managerial experience in previous jobs. George, on the other hand, mainly referred back to his own experience as an apprentice.

I looked back at how I was treated and maybe thought, take some of the good things and leave the bad things.

He was also careful to handle correctly all the paperwork connected with Brendan's employment and apprenticeship because of his own experience with a manager who had neglected these aspects.

Conclusion

Sound Fits was an example of a smooth and harmonious start to a young person's working life in a very small workplace. Tolerance and a sense of humour on both sides aided Brendan's entry to the workforce. The following attributes of a first-time worker were noted:

- tiredness towards the end of a full working day
- eagerness
- willingness to learn
- lack of bad habits
- wish to please
- restricted view of role in business
- lack of control over transport arrangements.

The following were the major strategies observed within the workplace to aid the development of employability skills:

- welcoming and accepting the first-time worker
- accepting that mistakes would be made
- supervising closely
- allocating appropriate tasks
- exposing the first-time worker to more complex and advanced work
- modelling appropriate behaviours and work habits
- direct instruction in certain employability skills
- showing the first-time worker that they were trusted
- showing confidence in the first-time worker's ability (this involved a certain amount of risk).

The following were identified as helpful strategies for the young person to follow:

- arriving at work punctually, and early if possible
- making conversation
- asking questions
- appearing keen
- learning from mistakes and not dwelling on them
- completing a pre-employment course.

Notwithstanding the above lists, it was noted that much of the development process of Brendan's employability skills was tacit and could not be articulated by either himself or his managers.

The case study added two more employability skills to the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry list. These were:

- understanding industry terminology, to aid efficient communication and instruction
- the ability to see the 'big picture' of a business rather than just one's own job.

The two managers felt very satisfied with their employment of a school leaver. As George said:

It's been great to have someone we can mould to our own way, and when Brendan's finished we'll take on another one [apprentice]. If someone's worked somewhere else they bring different attitudes and work ethic and so on. Having a new worker is probably the best way of doing it.

Superfoods

Paul Comyn

Introduction

Superfoods Limited was a large Australian retail company, with its head office in Sydney. It comprised a number of businesses, including Superfoods Supermarkets, Safeway, Food For Less, Superfoods Metro, Dick Smith Electronics, PowerHouse, Tandy Electronics, Superfoods Liquor, Big W, Superfoods Ezy Banking, and online services GreenGrocer and Superfoods HomeShop. Superfoods Supermarkets was the company's largest division, having 1400 stores spread across all Australian states in both metropolitan and regional locations.

Each year, Superfoods employed approximately 2000 new staff on a full-time basis. They were in addition to the many thousand casual new staff employed as part of the company's casual workforce of over 36 000. While many full-time new staff had previous casual employment, this was not a prerequisite for recruitment. The 2000 or so permanent new workers recruited each year represented approximately 65% of the company's annual intake of new permanent staff. It was not clear what percentage of these new staff were novice workers.

The company had its head office in the central business district of Sydney, with stores spread throughout the city's metropolitan area. One such store was located at Blacktown in the western suburbs of the city. It was situated in the Westfield shopping mall amongst a typical mix of retail and service stores of a medium-sized shopping mall.

Research method

The data-gathering involved a combination of telephone and face-to-face interviews. Contact with the traineeship manager was initially made by phone and followed up by an initial meeting at head office to discuss the project. Subsequent interviews were held at Westfield Towers in Blacktown where the regional headquarters are located, and at Westfield Plaza where a supermarket was located.

Interviews of between 30–60 minutes were conducted with various staff, and details of those interviewed are shown in the box below.

Staff member	Role
Traineeship manager	Human resources/training manager
Area trainer	Trainer
Area training manager	Human resources/training manager
Produce Department manager	Supervisor
Produce Department assistant manager	Co-worker
Administration assistant	Co-worker
Bakery assistant	Novice worker

Hand-written notes were taken during the interviews and follow-up discussions were also held with the traineeship manager and area training manager to clarify points of detail and obtain further information.

Findings

Why does the organisation recruit novice workers and how does it view them?

The traineeship manager suggested that Superfoods employed casual novice workers mainly to provide flexibility in their workforce. This flexibility was particularly important given the spread of trade (opening hours) that had increased from traditional trading hours of 9 am–5 pm (later on Thursday evenings) to 24 hours per day, 7 days per week in some stores. The traineeship manager and the area training manager both noted that the company had a tradition of employing novice workers, and they were aware that the retail industry was traditionally the first employment experience for many young people in Australia. Indeed the traineeship manager suggested that Superfoods did not especially target young novice workers in that 'they choose us more than we choose them'. Of the three senior training staff interviewed, two had been employees with Superfoods since leaving school.

While it was recognised by all those interviewed that novice workers couldn't be expected to come to a job with fully developed employability skills, the traineeship manager, area trainer, area training manager, Produce Department manager, and Produce Department assistant manager all acknowledged that novice workers possessed both positive and negative attributes. Attitudes amongst these staff of Superfoods towards novice workers are summarised in the box below.

Positive attributes	Negative attributes
Enthusiastic	Lack of a work ethic
Keen to learn	Immaturity
No preconceived ideas	Know-it-all attitude
Flexible	Lateness
Fresh	Not knowing who they should talk to
No bad habits	Lots of time required to train them
Can be trained as we want them	Casual approach to work
Focussed	Unreliable

What processes are used in the company to develop employability skills in novice workers?

Superfoods had a well-developed training system in place that incorporated formal induction training within an enterprise-specific structured training framework incorporating a range of outcomes in the form of nationally recognised qualifications at Australian Qualifications Framework levels II, III, IV and V. These pathways were based on the Superfoods Training Package which was a competency-based training framework endorsed by the Australian National Training Authority as an enterprise training package. While their package complied with the requirements of the national training framework and led to nationally recognised outcomes, it did not fully align with the general Retail Training Package which was designed for the retail industry as a whole.

All new employees at Superfoods participated in the induction program, which covered a number of modules within the Certificate II in Superfoods Store Operations. Initially induction was delivered in store but was subsequently delivered centrally on a regional basis to improve quality and allow for more effective management of the program. All staff complete a one-day induction program which covered a range of issues, including the company's history, occupational health and safety, food safety compliance requirements and an introduction to work systems that were related to the area in which the new employee will be placed. This off-the-job component was complemented with an on-the-job component utilising learning guides which were completed during the first three months of their employment. This first three months was considered as a probationary period.

The traineeship manager suggested that the learning guides were used to 'support the development of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes' which varied depending on the department they entered. All new casual staff completed the induction module off the job followed by three on-the-job modules. In the case of the Produce Department, new casual employees would complete modules related to produce operations, food safety plan procedures and temperature control units. The learning guides related to these modules required the new employee to complete activities that were done in the presence of their supervisor or department manager and then signed off. The traineeship manager noted that 'for any one activity, the new staff member, the department manager and a workplace assessor (who operated across a number of stores) would need to be involved in the process'. This sometimes led to complaints from new staff who found it difficult to complete the learning guides because of limited access to relevant staff, a problem exacerbated by different staff shifts.

While a number of the modules in the Superfoods training framework addressed elements of the employability skills, there were a number of more specific modules including:

- Communicate in the workplace module, which includes teamwork
- Point of sale module and Information and office technology module, which cover technology
- Retail calculations module, which partly addressed problem-solving.

At the higher Australian Qualifications Framework levels, modules explicitly covered problem-solving, promoting teamwork and planning/self-management. Thus, while Superfoods' team culture and communications were stressed in the induction, both the traineeship manager and the area trainer believed that much was left to the departmental manager to develop these skills.

All new staff had the opportunity to complete additional training which led to the Certificate II and III in Superfoods Store Operations, and then on to the Certificate IV and Diploma in Superfoods Management. The area trainer indicated that an individual's training needs were usually 'identified through the performance appraisal system', and while it was possible for casuals to pursue further study, the traineeship manager noted that the 'limited hours that they work and the training demands at store level' generally prevented casual workers from participating in additional training.

The traineeship manager noted that, in most cases, novice workers taken on as permanent staff were engaged through the Commonwealth Government's new apprenticeship scheme. Superfoods was a registered training organisation in its own right, managing over 1500 trainees across the country. These trainees worked towards the Certificate II or III in Superfoods Store Operations and were thus involved in a range of on- and off-the-job activities, involving learning guides and formal training programs.

Separate to this formal pathway, Superfoods had in place a '4/7/11' performance appraisal system which saw staff assessed at weeks 4, 7 and 11. The traineeship manager noted that this system sought to 'assess the attitudes of new employees'.

There were no structured efforts to develop employability skills through on-the-job training at Superfoods, and outside the structured training arrangements described, the traineeship manager, area trainer and area training manager noted that department managers had the most responsibility for developing employability skills amongst novice workers. The traineeship manager noted that department managers have staff training as part of their key performance indicators against which their performance is judged. While not formally part of a mentoring system, novice workers are generally introduced to a buddy in store, although that can be frustrated by operational demands and the vagaries of shift work.

The department manager suggested that novice workers were generally 'introduced to the work team and put straight to work', usually under the eye of the department manager or assistant manager.

In this way the members of the team, and the department manager in particular, look to build the attributes and skills that a novice worker may bring with them. The Produce Department assistant manager noted that novice workers were 'encouraged to learn how the work is done in the department'. The novice bakery assistant thought that senior staff 'take time to praise you when a job is done well'. The Produce Department manager, Produce Department assistant manager and novice bakery assistant all felt that taking the time to talk 'one to one' was seen as important, as was 'showing respect to young people'. In particular, the department manager believed it was 'easier to develop confidence in them and support them' and that helped develop employability skills in novice workers. The Produce Department manager, Produce Department assistant manager, administrative assistant and novice bakery assistant also felt that 'explaining things' well was a key element to developing employability skills through on-the-job training. However, because not all co-workers share this attitude towards novice workers, the department manager and the novice bakery assistant felt that the development of these skills varied across shifts and depended significantly on the personnel accompanying the novice worker at any one time.

There was also evidence that small team meetings were used to address communication, problem-solving and teamwork, but that their frequency varied and were clearly mediated by work demands. The Produce Department manager, Produce Department assistant manager, administrative assistant and novice bakery assistant all felt that leading by example was an important way to develop the employability skills of novice workers.

It was also suggested by the area trainer that the learning skills of novice workers were encouraged through an explicit focus on on-the-job training and by supporting a training culture within the workplace.

What do novice workers do themselves to develop their employability skills and how do they regard the development of these skills?

Both junior staff interviewed emphasised previous part-time employment as being important to the development of their employability skills, particularly in relation to communication skills and teamwork. The novice bakery assistant also stressed that it was important because it made her aware of 'what behaviour was expected at work' as well as the attitudes of reliability and punctuality. The Produce Department manager and Produce Department assistant manager felt that part-time work introduced young people to the different culture of the workplace and, depending on the nature of the work, suggested that initiative and enterprise were also developed. In addition to previous employment experience, the novice bakery assistant also emphasised the nature of work in the stores and the way that communication, problem-solving and team skills were developed through the way that work was done in the various departments. She felt that her employability skills were best developed when her colleagues and in particular, her supervisor, paid attention to her, encouraged her and congratulated her when she had completed a task as required. One supervisor in particular was singled out for praise. He was especially congratulated for noticing effort, giving encouragement and 'giving tips on how to do things better'.

Those interviewed had mixed views about the role that schooling played in the development of employability skills. The administrative assistant felt that, while maturity contributed to the development of her employability skills, she also felt that by completing her final years of schooling (up to Year 12 in New South Wales), she had improved her communication skills, her ability to deal with information and her learning skills. The novice bakery assistant, who had only recently found employment because of ongoing medical problems, also noted further studies at TAFE and involvement in labour market programs as being ways in which she had developed employability skills. In particular, experience with the Work for the Dole Program was mentioned as experience that developed her skills in planning and organising as well as working as part of a team.

Notwithstanding these elements, all those interviewed believed that the attributes of individuals often predetermined the extent to which particular employability skills could be developed. Thus in some ways, employability skills were seen to be innate things that 'you either had or you didn't'.

The influence of family was also particularly noted by the novice bakery assistant who reflected that, in her large family, 'if you didn't talk you weren't heard'. She felt that her well-developed communication skills were thus not particularly developed through schooling nor as a result of her limited previous work experience through casual employment with Superfoods. Conversely, skills in enterprise and initiative for her were seen as coming mainly from her current employment.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

While the traineeship manager expressed the view that the current training arrangements adequately provided for the development of employability skills, a number of suggestions were made by others as to how novice workers could be better supported. The novice workers suggested that managers should be given more explicit training on how to develop the employability skills through on-the-job training. They suggested that help sheets and other training tools could be developed to help departmental managers 'make work more about learning'.

The Produce Department manager suggested that more use could also be made of videos that highlighted daily routines and common problems that occurred in each department. He also suggested that the motivation of novice workers was a key to helping them develop employability skills. By 'talking and explaining the work', by 'setting realistic goals' and by 'encouraging and rewarding work well done', novice workers were better motivated and thus possibly more responsive to specific suggestions related to employability skills, such as how to communicate more effectively in the team and how to organise their activities to improve efficiency. In many cases, explicit efforts to address employability skills occurred in response to conflict or when an individual experienced difficulty in the workplace. When these opportunities did not arise, the feeling amongst all those interviewed was that novice workers developed the employability skills through learning how to do the job well and that no explicit methods or techniques were required.

Are there differences between the employability skills required by, and developed in, part-time student jobs and full-time jobs?

All those interviewed indicated that they believed there was no difference between the employability skills required by novice part-time workers and the skills required by novice full-time workers. There were differences identified between novice and more experienced workers, with the Produce Department manager and Produce Department assistant manager believing that self-management was outside the responsibility of novice workers who were generally under constant supervision.

Generally speaking, those interviewed believed that new staff with previous employment experience had better developed employability skills. However, it was acknowledged by the traineeship manager that students straight from school could possess equal skill levels if the school had relevant and stimulating learning environments that gave students the chance to develop these sorts of skills. However, the traineeship manager and area trainer also felt that previous part-time or casual work experience was 'no guarantee of better developed employability skills' in that an individual's personality and values contributed as much.

Nevertheless, there was a difference noted between casual and permanent staff in that the limited hours of work and the vagaries of shiftwork affecting casuals led to differences in the way that employability skills were developed amongst novice workers.

Conclusion

Superfoods was a major national retailer with an extensive network of supermarkets across metropolitan and regional Australia. They were a major employer of young people through both casual and permanent positions. Superfoods had a well-established training system that delivered nationally recognised outcomes within Australia's VET system. They had a developed and endorsed enterprise training package that underpinned the delivery of on- and off-the-job training

programs in the enterprise. These programs were available to casual and permanent staff, with novice workers exposed to aspects of the framework as demanded by their job role.

At the store level, it appeared that there was an established training and learning culture which generally provided a good environment for novice workers to develop as individuals and as members of the retail industry. This however, depended on individual supervisors and co-workers who were expected to manage the development of these skills and attributes amongst novice workers.

In particular, the findings suggest that the development of employability skills amongst novice workers in this workplace seemed to be developed through:

- the presence of a formalised training program involving both on- and off-the-job components
- the use of a buddy system
- well-trained supervisors
- maintaining a training culture.

Novice workers valued one-to-one communication, personal support and motivation and they believed that this contributed to the development of employability skills. Developing rapport through effective communication skills was an important foundation for the development of employability skills. Casual employment and shift work limited the capacity of novice workers to develop employability skills.

Supernova Electrical

Paul Comyn

Introduction

Supernova Electrical was a large electrical engineering and contracting firm based in the western suburbs of Sydney at Bankstown. The firm had three subsidiaries; namely, a service company (staff of 12), a data company (staff of 60) and a construction company (staff of 208). The main focus of the company was providing electrical design and fitout services on construction sites across New South Wales. At the time of the study, Supernova Electrical was one of the largest electrical contracting firms in New South Wales.

In the construction division, the company operated a number of work teams that were rotated around building sites depending on the size of the job and the stage of work. Typically, the company was involved in 15 to 20 construction jobs at any one time, with the bulk of work involving sites in the Sydney metropolitan area. A medium-sized construction job normally involved a team of 20–30 electrical tradespeople and apprentices under the supervision of a foreman and site project manager, also employed by Supernova Electrical.

At any one time, the company employed between 60–70 apprentices depending on completion rates and operational cycles. Most years saw the company recruiting approximately 20 novice workers as electrical apprentices through a single intake, which was generally run at the beginning of the calendar year. The operations manager acted as the apprentice master, and at the time of the study, the company employed 64 apprentices out of a total staff of 280.

Research method

The data-gathering involved a combination of telephone and face-to-face interviews. Contact with the operations manager was initially made by phone and followed up by an initial meeting and interview at head office to discuss the project. Subsequent interviews were held at the Watermark construction site at Pyrmont, an inner city suburb of Sydney.

Interviews of between 30–60 minutes were conducted with various staff. Details of those interviewed are shown in the box below.

Staff member	Role
Operations manager	HR/training manager
Site project manager	Line manager
Site foreman	Supervisor
Leading hand	Supervisor/co-worker
Apprentice	Novice worker
Apprentice	Novice worker

Note: HR=human resources

Hand-written notes were taken during the interviews and follow-up discussions were also held with the operations manager and site project manager to clarify points of detail and obtain further information.

One novice worker had come to Supernova after completing Year 12 at a Sydney high school. Another had commenced the electrical apprenticeship after not completing computer studies at TAFE. Both novice workers had some previous work experience on a casual basis, involving gardening and packing at the local supermarket.

Findings

Why does the organisation recruit novice workers and how does it view them?

The operations manager had been employed with the company for three years. Being responsible for apprentices, he suggested that the major reason for employing apprentices as novice workers was 'the skill demands within the industry. The construction industry requires a mix of skilled and semi-skilled workers who are able to complete the full range of tasks that present themselves on site. Because of this, the company maintains a ratio of skilled and semi-skilled staff'.

The structure of the electrical trade was also seen to determine the type of work and the skill mix required on sites, as this was based on industrial arrangements related to the wages payable to employees. Thus wage differentials were noted as a reason why novice workers were employed, as was the turnover of staff. The operations manager noted that amongst novice workers, the company was faced with non-completions of 'around 30–40% per year'. To address this, the operations manager had recently introduced ongoing assessments of apprentices in an attempt to increase completion rates.

The high non-completion rates also led the company to review its recruitment processes, with the operations manager overseeing a three-stage interview process which was 'a bit more rigorous' and directed at 'increasing completion rates'.

While it was recognised that novice workers couldn't be expected to come to a job with fully developed employability skills, the operations manager, site project manager, site foreman and leading hand all acknowledged that novice workers possessed both positive and negative attributes. Attitudes amongst these staff of Supernova Electrical towards novice workers are summarised in the box below.

Positive attributes	Negative attributes
Enthusiastic	Lack of respect for tradespeople
Keen to learn	Unstable personal lives
Revitalising	Indiscipline
Flexible	Lateness
Fresh	Irresponsible
No bad work habits	Lack of commitment to studies
Eager	Idleness
Conscientious	Require teaching

While these attitudes were acknowledged by those interviewed, it was also apparent that they did not believe that technical skills were very important for novice workers. The operations manager, site project manager, site foreman and leading hand all believed that the right attitude was valued most.

Another attitude towards novice workers in this firm recognised the tradition of training novice workers through an apprenticeship and valued the revitalising effect that novice staff had on other staff within the company. This point was made particularly by the site project manager and the site foreman who suggested that a natural cycle was in place, through which 'new blood' was brought in to the company, keeping the 'place fresh' and providing a 'glimpse of what today's youth are like'.

What processes are used in the company to develop employability skills in novice workers?

Efforts to develop employability skills amongst novice workers were seen to start with the formal induction process that the company had in place. Novice workers completed a company induction and a site induction prior to commencing work. The company induction included safety training, an introduction to the culture and operations of the company and covered administrative matters such as pay and job entitlements. The site induction covered mainly safety-related matters, but also touched on company objectives, project controllers and communication networks on the site. While these arrangements did not specifically and explicitly address employability skills, they were viewed by all staff interviewed as being important for establishing the 'right attitudes towards the job'.

After these formal induction processes, novice workers were introduced by the foreman to their supervisor who was normally the leading hand on a team. The foreman noted that, while some time was spent with the novice worker initially 'to settle them in', they were generally 'left to themselves to fit in'. While leading hands were encouraged to ask questions and support the apprentice's development, it was left up to the individual leading hand to manage, with little monitoring from more senior staff unless problems became apparent to the site project manager or foreman. The site project manager reflected on one experience when he had heard that an apprentice had 'wondered out loud about what I did, so I made him follow me around for a day to see how busy I am. He couldn't keep up and I think he got a bit of a surprise, but it was good to let him see what goes on in a job'.

Once per year, novice workers were involved in follow-up interviews with the operations manager. These were additional and separate to the efforts initiated on site by the foreman or site project manager, who on occasion had informal 'chats' with novice workers who were 'in a bit of trouble'. These interventions were generally made when interpersonal problems existed or if the novice worker's performance was not up to standard. If the problem persisted, letters were sent home and parents were invited to participate in the company's efforts to support the novice workers through their apprenticeship. This point was reached after dialogue between the foremen/site project manager/operations manager after meetings and discussions on site had not resolved the issue.

This approach was viewed by the operations manager and site project manager as being important not only for the development of the novice workers as young people, but also because of the benefits to the company through retaining trained staff.

Communication skills and interpersonal skills were emphasised during induction processes, and on site, those interviewed suggested that novice workers were 'expected to fit in'.

Indeed the operations manager expressed the view that the company was trying to increase the focus on the 'soft skills' because 'it show[s] that someone's taking an interest in them'. The novice workers themselves felt that it was important to have someone to contact and speak with, and while a formal mentoring system was not in place, it appeared that company staff were aware that novice workers needed to be able to rely on a particular individual to support their transition to work and the development of their employability skills.

These arrangements at Supernova Electrical were ad hoc, and no doubt influenced by the nature of the construction industry itself, where teams are formed and reformed across multiple sites. The site project manager and foreman both thought that this challenged the ability of the company to maintain adequate levels of support to novice workers. While rotation across different tradespeople is designed to provide the apprentice exposure to the full range of work tasks, it occurred on an ad hoc basis in Supernova Electrical. The site project manager suggested that the culture of the company sometimes worked against this because 'things have to be done quickly and we try and move them around when we can, but it doesn't always happen'. Despite these practices, it was recognised by the operations manager that creating the right environment from the outset would reduce the need to subsequently intervene when problems arose, and notwithstanding the efforts of company staff to support the socialisation of novice workers, all those interviewed believed that, at the end of the day, novice workers were expected 'to start taking responsibility for themselves, and the sooner that happen[ed] the better'.

The development of employability skills and attributes was also supported through the apprentice assessment checklists used by supervisors. This assessment program also included self-assessments by the novice workers which were also provided to TAFE and thus linked to the off-the-job assessment processes required through the apprenticeship. These assessment instruments explicitly made reference to communication skills, learning skills, reliability, punctuality, initiative, teamwork and conduct. Novice workers were expected to complete these checklists, consider the reports generated by the foreman/leading hand and then discuss with the site project manager any issues or inconsistencies. The foreman on the Watermark site also set separate assessments for novice workers in the form of 'homework', and while not part of company policy, these interventions occurred approximately once a month, with the foreman seeing them as a way of getting novice workers to 'show some initiative' and to also 'test their enthusiasm'.

The site project manager indicated that he took problem novice workers to site meetings with senior project staff as a way of emphasising to novice workers the importance of learning skills and teamwork. While additional technical training opportunities from equipment and materials vendors were also made available to novice workers, the operations manager and the site project manager both expressed concerns that the apprentices did not get involved and expressed frustration at the low participation rates.

Thus at Supernova Electrical, the development of employability skills and attitudes was mainly implicit, with the socialisation process of 'fitting in on site' supplemented by the work itself as the vehicle for the development of those skills.

What do novice workers do themselves to develop their employability skills and how do they regard the development of these skills?

All those interviewed believed that previous work experience contributed significantly to the development of employability skills. Whether part-time work while still at school or permanent employment prior to commencing a trade, strong connections were made between work and the

development of employability skills. As noted by the foreman at the Watermark site, once the 'initial ice [was] broken' and the novice worker 'knew the ropes', the employability skills would develop 'through learning how the job is done'. In saying this however, the foreman and the novice workers themselves recognised that the organisation of work had an impact on this, particularly in relation to teamwork, problem-solving and self-management skills. One novice worker noted that 'just chasing … does nothing, and you get all the shit jobs that the others don't want to do'. Another noted that 'getting the lunches for the other blokes and stuff like that [was] crap'. Thus while work organisation impacted on the development of employability skills, the culture of the industry was also relevant. The novice workers both suggested that while there was generally a culture of enquiry in that it was 'OK to ask questions' they noted that 'a lot is left up to us to work out. Some guys are OK and like you asking questions, others don't and tell you to get on with job because they've already explained it'. The expectation of the site project manager was that if there were any problems, the novice workers would approach him or the foreman.

In addition to the role of previous casual work experience in developing employability skills, school experiences were also identified by all those interviewed as being relevant. In particular, the novice workers suggested that communication skills and learning skills were developed at school, with problem-solving and communication skills stressed as being further developed through the work that they were involved in. Generally speaking, staff had mixed views about the role that schooling played in developing employability skills, with the foreman suggesting that 'it doesn't do much'. Sport and those events that were 'real' and which involved planning and organising activities were also identified by the novice workers as being helpful in developing employability skills and attributes. Further studies at TAFE were also noted as being relevant to the development of their employability skills although they were not ascribed as much significance as work and on-the-job training. The novice workers valued learning skills, teamwork and communication as the most important employability skills that they required for their work.

The site project manager and the operations manager also identified a link between maturity and levels of development in the employability skills and attributes, but notwithstanding these influences, the point was stressed by all those interviewed that the development of employability skills was significantly related to an individual and their attitude. Similarly, the novice workers noted that the attitudes of their work colleagues and their immediate supervisors influenced whether or not employability skills were developed. In particular, those colleagues that were rude, abusive or demeaning were felt to be unsupportive and not conducive to learning on the job. Those colleagues that showed respect and demonstrated genuine interest in the apprentice were felt to be those who were most effective in supporting the development of employability skills.

How could the development of employability skills be improved?

Responsibility for the development of employability skills amongst novice workers seemed split between supervisors and leading hands and the novice workers themselves. While all those interviewed indicated that novice workers simply developed these skills as they progressed in the job, the novice workers themselves felt that supervisors and leading hands had more influence on whether they developed these non-technical skills and attributes.

The foreman, site project manager and novice workers all indicated that there was a significant emphasis on speed in the industry, which was often achieved at the expense of quality. The novice workers in particular felt that 'if more time was taken to explain things clearly in the first place, there wouldn't be as much time lost in the long run'. This emphasis on speed was seen as a more recent development in the industry, with both the foreman and the site project manager indicating that the quality of both on- and off-the-job training and support for novice workers had deteriorated as a result since their time in the trade.

The staff identified by the novice workers as being good at supporting the development of employability skills were those who were seen to have well-developed communication skills and who showed the novice workers 'some respect'. Staff who talked down to novice workers were

seen as overly negative and not concerned with their development as tradespeople nor as individual members of the team. The novice workers suggested that supervisors could be given more explicit coaching on how to support apprentices in the development of both technical and non-technical skills.

Given unlimited time and resources, the operations manager, site project manager, foreman and leading hand all indicated that more time should be spent with novice workers on a one-to-one basis. Relatedly, novice workers felt that the attitudes of supervisors and senior colleagues could be softened so that novice workers were not always harassed and given such as hard time. In this way, supervisors needed to 'back off a little bit' and have less emphasis on speed. Increased variety in work was also noted by the novice workers as being a way for them to better develop employability skills and attitudes as opposed to allotting novice workers the most menial and dirty jobs, simply so the more senior staff did not have to do them.

Are there differences between the employability skills required by, and developed in, part-time student jobs and full-time jobs?

Generally speaking, all those interviewed felt that students with previous employment experience had better developed employability skills. It was acknowledged however, that students straight from school could possess equal skill levels if, as the site project manager suggested, the school had 'the right sort of programs in place'. All those interviewed also felt that previous part-time or casual work experience was no guarantee of better developed employability skills in that an individual's personality and values contributed as much to their development.

However, reference was made to earlier times when work experience for school students was a regular occurrence which provided a good opportunity for the company to 'test the students and pick the ones with the right attitude'. It was suggested by the foreman at Watermark that such programs are no longer in place because of issues related to insurance and industrial concerns related to occupational health and safety. This understanding may be more related to awareness, given that established VET-in-school programs do provide a vehicle for students to address problematic issues in the construction industry prior to any placements being implemented.

Conclusion

Supernova Electrical was a large electrical contracting firm that operated in the building and construction industry in New South Wales. While it had some established systems and procedures in place to support novice workers, much of the responsibility collectively rested with supervisors and leading hands.

As a result, the approach and style of individuals impacted significantly on the experiences of novice workers in this company, with the effect that the development of employability skills was largely a hit-and-miss affair. In saying this however, established approaches to dispute resolution were in place, with the company taking steps to increase the number of apprentices who completed their indenture.

Ultimately, much was left to the individual apprentice in terms of the development of their employability skills. In particular, the findings suggest that the development of employability skills amongst novice workers seemed to be developed at Supernova Electrical through the use of a buddy system, rotation amongst staff and workplace assessments.

Novice workers value one-to-one communication, personal support and motivation and they believe that this contributes to the development of employability skills. In addition, the attitudes of site staff strongly influence the extent to which novice workers develop employability skills.

Appendix B—Case study protocols

The case study materials include:

- information sheets for interviewers and interviewees that detail the project and explain employability skills definition and framework
- workplace profile questions used to capture data about industry type, employment profile, relevant awards etc.
- employability skills list from the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry report. Use attributes as well as skills
- interview schedules containing a series of questions for different stakeholders
- information sheet and consent forms.

These materials have been developed with reference to the research questions identified as shaping the project.

Workplace profile

Researchers need to establish:

- industry area
- size of company and single site/multi-site; Australia-wide/state-based
- any particular structural issues e.g. franchises
- rough numbers and types of workers; different occupations, full-time/part-time; industrial awards
- participation in accredited training
- labour turnover rates (high/medium/low) and any other relevant workforce issues
- for group training companies, industry areas served etc.

Interview schedules

Here are the draft interview questions for the following possible respondents:

- human resources/training manager
- line manager/manager/supervisor/owner–manager
- young employee
- co-worker.

The questions listed on the following pages were developed by the research team and have been amended on the advice of both reference groups. Further amendments may be made after the pilot case study at Bakers Delight.

Definition of novice workers

Novice workers are those young people who have never had a formal paid job before. (Babysitting/paper delivery, work experience, work placements, sports refereeing etc. don't count as formal jobs).

Questions for human resources/training manager (needs to be adapted if the HR is a regional or national manager)

How many young school leavers/part-time student workers would you recruit in a year?

What percentage of your annual intake would such workers represent?

Why do you choose to recruit novice workers?

Why do you not choose to recruit novice workers?

What are the special attributes of novice workers? (Both positive and negative)

What special steps do you take to introduce novice workers into your workplace? Could we please view or take away copies of your induction material and (if applicable) recruitment material?

Looking at this list, how important are these skills in your company? Would you add any others to the list?

Do you take any specific steps to develop employability skills amongst novice workers that are recruited? What are these steps? Why do you think these measures are necessary? How did you learn how to undertake this process?

Who is involved in these measures? Do they enjoy it or find it an imposition?

Are any of these measures included in programs available to other staff within the organisation?

Do any of these measures lead to recognition within the VET system or relate to formal training programs available in the workplace?

In what way do you think these measures are effective? What stops these measures from being more effective?

Assuming an ideal world (i.e. unlimited time and resources in your organisation), what measures do you think should be in place to develop employability skills amongst the novice workers recruited by your organisation?

How do you think that other employers should be encouraged to focus on developing the employability skills of novice workers recruited by their organisation?

FOR SCHOOL LEAVER PEOPLE

If some of your full-time school leavers come to you from part-time jobs, what is your view of the level of employability skills they bring with them from part-time work?

FOR PART-TIME STUDENT WORKER PEOPLE

Do you think the employability skills your part-time student workers develop are sufficient for their subsequent full-time jobs?

Questions for line manager/manager/supervisor/owner–manager

How many school leavers/part-time student workers have you managed?

What are the special attributes of young school leavers/part-time student workers? (positive and negative)

What, if any, special steps do you take to introduce novice workers into your work area?

Are these measures your own initiative or part of established organisational procedures? How did you learn how to do it?

Looking at this list of employability skills, which ones do you think are the most important for the jobs normally filled by novice workers in your work area? Would you add any others to the list?

Do you take any specific steps to develop employability skills amongst novice workers in your company/department? What are they? What would happen if you didn't? Do you enjoy doing it, or not? If so, why?

In what way do you think the measures are effective? What stops these measures from being more effecuve?

Why do you think these measures are necessary?

Can you say what links or differences there might be between training novice workers in employability skills and training them in technical skills?

Who else in your work area or the organisation as a whole is involved in the development of employability skills in novice workers?

Assuming an ideal world (i.e. unlimited time and resources in your organisation), what measures do you think should be in place to develop employability skills amongst novice workers recruited by your organisation?

How do you think that other employers should be encouraged to focus on developing the employability skills of school leavers recruited by their organisation?

FOR SCHOOL LEAVER PEOPLE

If some of your full-time school leavers come to you from part-time jobs, what is your view of the level of employability skills they bring with them from part-time work?

FOR PART-TIME STUDENT WORKER PEOPLE

Do you think the employability skills your part-time student workers develop are sufficient for their subsequent full-time jobs?

Questions for young employee

Why did you decide to join the workforce when you applied for this job, and why did you apply to this organisation?

Do you enjoy your job?

What are the three best things and the three worst things about the job?

Looking at this list of employability skills, which ones do you think are the most important for your job?

Would you add any others to the list?

Is it easy or hard to separate out employability skills from the technical skills involved in your job?

Which of these employability skills do you think you have developed since starting work?

Which did you have before you started the job and where did you develop them?

What have your employer or your colleagues in the workplace done to help you develop these skills? Are some people better at it than others? If so, why and how?

Do you think that your employer or workplace should do more to help you develop these skills?

FOR SCHOOL LEAVERS

Do you think you would have developed these employability skills in part-time work if you had had a job while you were at school? All of them or just some?

FOR PART-TIME STUDENT WORKER PEOPLE

Do you think the employability skills you are developing in your job are sufficient for your subsequent full-time jobs?

Do you think that your time at school helped you in the development of employability skills?

In general, how could employers develop the employability skills of school leavers that they recruit?

Questions for co-worker

What are the special attributes of school leavers/part-time student workers (positive and negative)?

Looking at this list of employability skills, which ones do you think are the most important for the jobs normally filled by novice workers in your work area?

Would you add any others to the list?

Are you aware of any specific steps that are taken to develop these sorts of skills and attributes amongst novice workers recruited in this organisation? By whom?

Why do you think these measures are necessary?

In what way do you think the measures are effective? What stops these measures from being more effective?

What do you yourself do to develop employability skills in novice workers who work with you? What would happen if you didn't? Do you enjoy doing it or not? If yes, why? How did you learn how to do it?

Are there differences between training novice workers in employability skills and training them in the technical side of the job?

Assuming an ideal world (i.e. unlimited time and resources in your company), what measures do you think should be in place to develop employability skills amongst novice workers recruited by your organisation?

FOR SCHOOL LEAVER PEOPLE

If some of your full-time school leavers come to you from part-time jobs, what is your view of the level of employability skills they bring with them from part-time work?

FOR PART-TIME STUDENT WORKER PEOPLE

Do you think the employability skills that part-time student workers who work with you develop are sufficient for their subsequent full-time jobs?

Employability skills framework

The Employability Skills Framework incorporates the following *personal attributes* that contribute to overall employability:

- loyalty
- commitment
- honesty and integrity
- enthusiasm
- reliability
- personal presentation
- common sense
- positive self-esteem
- a sense of humour
- a balanced attitude to work and home life
- an ability to deal with pressure
- motivation
- adaptability.

Key employability skills

- *communication skills* that contribute to productive and harmonious relations across employees and customers
- *team work skills* that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes
- *problem-solving skills* that contribute to productive outcomes
- *initiative and enterprise skills* that contribute to innovative outcomes
- *planning and organising skills* that contribute to long and short-term strategic planning
- *self-management skills* that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth
- *learning skills* that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes
- *technology skills* that contribute to effective execution of tasks.

Source: Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Business Council of Australia (2002)

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